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HENRIK IBSEN
PEER GYNT

TRANSLATED BY
R FARQUHARSON SHARP



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NEW YORK E P DUTTON & CO INC

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by
J M DENT & SONS LTD
Aldine House Bedford Street London
Made in Great Britain
at
The Aldine Press Letchworth Herts
First published in this edition 1921
Last reprinted 1956

INTRODUCTION

Peer Gynt was written in 1867, when Ibsen was nearly forty¹ It followed his other great dramatic poem, *Brand*, by rather less than two years,—for *Brand*, though not published till 1866, was written in 1865 The contrast offered by the audacious high spirits of *Peer Gynt* to the austere gloom of *Brand* was a reflection of a welcome change in their author's worldly circumstances Ibsen's growing independence of thought and his increasing frankness in insisting upon it (as he had done in his play *Love's Comedy*) had aroused a tempest of criticism in his own country, and in 1864 he had cast off the embarrassing trammels of national and family ties and had gone into voluntary exile in Italy This had been rendered possible by a small grant of money that had been awarded him by the Norwegian government and substantially supplemented by the kindness of one or two friends *Brand* was the first outcome of his detachment from real poverty It to a great extent rehabilitated his reputation at home, and put some money in his pocket, and this success further resulted in the Norwegian government's allotting him a "literary pension" of some ninety pounds a year This sum, together with what he expected to make by his pen, opened out a prospect of a life of literary activity unhampered by continual anxiety as to his daily bread

Peer Gynt obviously was written when his temperament was on the rebound and he was beginning to feel assurance that he could be as independent in thought and word as he pleased It was conceived (as he says in a letter to Bjornson) in the mood of a "Korstog-Jubel"—a "Crusader's Song of Triumph" "After *Brand* came *Peer Gynt*, as though of itself," he says in another

¹ Further details respecting Ibsen's life and writings will be found in the introductions to the five preceding volumes of Ibsen's plays in "Everyman's Library"

letter,¹ "it was written in Southern Italy, in the Island of Ischia and at Sorrento So far away from one's future readers, one becomes reckless" Again, in a letter written some five years after *Peer Gynt* appeared, he says "*Peer Gynt* is the very antithesis of *Brand* It is reckless and formless, written with no thought of the consequences—as I could only dare to write when far from my own country"

In 1880 Ibsen replied to one of his translators, who had asked for information as to the genesis of *Peer Gynt* in its author's brain "to make the matter intelligible I should have to write a whole book, and for that the time has not yet come Everything that I have written has the closest possible connection with what I have lived through, even if it has not been my own personal experience, in every new poem or play I have aimed at my own spiritual emancipation and purification" As a matter of fact one of the outstanding features of *Peer Gynt*—the character of Aase, Peer's mother, and the incidents woven round her—was, as we learn from Ibsen's letters, derived directly from his own experiences "This poem," he wrote to his friend Hansen in 1870, "contains much that is reminiscent of my own youth, for Aase, my mother—with necessary exaggerations—served as model" Again, in a letter written to Brandes in 1882, he says "My father was a merchant with a large business and wide connections, and he enjoyed dispensing reckless hospitality In 1836 he failed, and nothing was left to us except a farm . In writing *Peer Gynt* I had the circumstances and memories of my own childhood before me when I described the life in the house of 'the rich John Gynt' "

With its obvious satire on the typical Norwegian temperament, as well as on what Ibsen considered a ridiculous aspiration for "national self-realisation," it is not surprising that *Peer Gynt* was not at first as popular in Norway as *Brand* had been Seven editions of *Brand* had appeared before *Peer Gynt* reached its third In 1876 Ibsen prepared an abridged version of *Peer Gynt* for representation at the Christiania theatre,

¹I quote from Mary Monson's translation of Ibsen's Correspondence, published in 1905

where it was performed with Grieg's incidental music, and by degrees it became a stock feature in the repertoires of the chief Scandinavian theatres. The earliest German translation of the poem was published in 1881, the first English in 1892, and the first French in 1896. In Germany and in France performances have been given of abridged versions, and in 1906 Richard Mansfield produced an almost complete version at Chicago. In this country there has not yet been any attempt at a complete public performance, though a selection of scenes, translated by Miss I. M. Pagan, has been performed semi-privately.

Peer Gynt is (as Ibsen was emphatic in asserting) first and foremost a poetic fantasy, and only incidentally a satire. It is a fantasy woven out of the folklore of its author's country and embroidered by his wealth of thought and keen wit. There is a philosophy to be found in it, no doubt, but Ibsen did not set out to write a philosophical poem, but a fantasy. It contains many a shaft of satire, no doubt, but it was not primarily intended as a satirical poem, but as sheer fantasy. This cannot be too emphatically insisted upon, nor too diligently remembered in reading the poem. In a letter to his publisher, soon after *Peer Gynt* had made its appearance, Ibsen wrote: "I learn that the book has created great excitement in Norway. This does not trouble me in the least, but both there and in Denmark they have discovered much more satire in it than was intended by me. Why can they not read the book as a poem? For as such I wrote it. The satirical passages are pretty well isolated. But if the Norwegians of to-day recognise themselves, as it would appear they do, in the character of *Peer Gynt*, that is the good people's own affair."

Peer Gynt has been the prey of many commentators, and of the majority of them the question might well be asked: "Why can you not read it as a fantasy?" For as such Ibsen wrote it." Ibsen himself ruefully complained more than once that his critics persisted in reading far more into his work than he had intentionally put there, and *Peer Gynt* has been a sufferer in this respect. The wise reader, approaching the poem for the

first time, will simply abandon himself or herself to the current of fancy—now laughing, now tender, now ironical—that sweeps through it, remembering that it is folklore, and the folklore of a people to whose peasantry Trolls and Witches are even to-day a reality. There are isolated difficulties to be encountered in the reading, no doubt, an attempt has been made to touch on some of them in footnotes to the present translation, but, in the main, if the poem be read with an appreciation of its origin and intention, and with a modicum of common sense, its fantasy need not unduly bewilder nor its philosophy unduly puzzle. Even caprice is permissible in a fantasy, Ibsen, on being asked if he corroborated a suggested explanation of a certain scene in *Peer Gynt*, replied that nothing had been farther from his thoughts than what his commentator suggested, and that he had as a matter of fact “stuck in the scene as a mere caprice”

In sending his publishers the manuscript of the poem, Ibsen wrote “It may interest you to know that *Peer Gynt* was a real person, who lived in Gudbrandsdal, probably at the end of last, or the beginning of this, century. His name is still [1867] well known among the peasants there, but of his exploits not much more is known than is to be found in Asbjornsen’s *Norwegian Fairy Tales*. Thus I have not had very much to build upon, but that has left me so much the more liberty.” In Asbjornsen’s book *Peer Gynt*’s chief exploits lie in the direction of fighting and conquering Trolls.

It is practically impossible for any translation of *Peer Gynt* to be entirely satisfactory. It must be in verse, a prose version of such a fantasy is unthinkable—even if it were not for the fact that its author declared that he would rather never see it translated than translated into prose. One of the charms of the diction of the original is the ingenious variation of metre for scenes of varying nature, that, translation may attempt to reproduce, but the ingenuity of its rhymes cannot be reproduced, and its verbal brilliance must be dulled, in translation.

The present translator has deliberately avoided two

shackling conditions which, it is permissible to think, have hampered previous translators of the poem, he has not attempted rhymed verse, and he has refused to be fettered by a superstitious regard for purely verbal literalness or for "line for line" rendering. He has made an attempt to follow the metres of the original, in unrhymed verse, keeping as closely to the original's literal meaning as was compatible with intelligibility in another tongue—his aim being to produce a version that might be read with sufficient ease to induce appreciation of this amazing work, and appreciation of *Peer Gynt* is bound to lead to admiration of it.

R. FARQUHARSON SHARP

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THE CHARACTERS

AASE, widow of John Gynt, a peasant
PEER GYNT, her son
Two Old Women with corn-sacks
ASLAK, a blacksmith
Wedding Guests, a Steward at the Wedding, a Fiddler, etc.
A STRANGER and his Wife
SOLVEIG and little HELGA, their daughters
The Owner of Hægstad Farm
INGRID, his daughter
The BRIDEGROOM and his parents
Three COWHERD GIRLS A WOMAN IN GREEN
The TROLL KING Several Trolls of his Court
Troll Boys and Girls Two Witches Hobgoblins, Brownies,
Elves, etc
An Ugly Urchin A Voice in the Gloom Birds' Cries
KARI, a cotter's wife
MR COTTON, MONSIEUR BALLON, HERR VON EBERKOPF and
HERR TRUMPETERSTRAALE, tourists
A Thief and a Receiver of Stolen Goods
ANITRA, daughter of a Bedouin Chief
Arabs, Female Slaves, Dancing Girls, etc
The Statue of Memnon (with song) The Sphinx at Gizeh
(dumb)
PROFESSOR BEGRIFFENFELDT, Ph D , in charge of the Lunatic
Asylum at Cairo
Lunatics with their Keepers
HUHU, a language-reformer from the Malabar coast
HUSSEIN, an Eastern Secretary of State
A Fellah, carrying a royal mummy
A Norwegian Skipper and his Crew A Strange Passenger
A PRIEST A Funeral Party A BUTTON-MOULDER A THIN
MAN

(The action, which begins in the early years of the century and ends somewhere about our own day [1867], takes place partly in the Gudbrandsdal and on the surrounding mountain-tops, partly on the coast of Morocco, in the Sahara Desert, in the Cairo Lunatic Asylum, at Sea, etc)

PEER GYNT

ACT I

SCENE I

(SCENE —*The wooded mountain-side near AASE'S farm, with a stream rushing past On the farther bank stands an old mill It is a hot summer's day* PEER GYNT, a sturdy youth of twenty, comes down the path, followed by his mother AASE, who is short and slight. She is scolding him angrily)

AASE.

Peer, you're lying!

PEER GYNT (*without stopping*)

No, I'm not!

AASE

Well then, will you swear it's true?

PEER GYNT.

Swear? Why should I?

AASE

Ah, you daren't!
Your whole tale's a pack of lies!

PEER GYNT.

Every blessed word is true

Peer Gynt

AASE (*facing him*)

I wonder you can face your mother!
First of all, just when the work
Is at busiest, off you go
To prow! about the hills for weeks
After reindeer in the snow,
Come back with your clothes in rags,
Game-bag empty—and no gun!
Then you have the cheek to think
You can make your mother swallow
Such a pack of lies as this
About your hunting!—Tell me, then,
Where you found this precious buck?

PEER GYNT

West of Gendin

AASE (*with a scornful laugh*).

I dare say!

PEER GYNT

I was leeward of the blast,
And behind a clump of trees
He was scraping in the snow
For some moss——

AASE (*as before*)

Oh yes, no doubt!

PEER GYNT

I stood and listened, held my breath,
Heard the scraping of his hoof,
Saw the antlers of his horns,
Then upon my belly crawled
Carefully between the rocks,
Peeped from cover of the stones—
Such a buck, so sleek and fat,
I suppose was never seen!

AASE

I expect not!

PEER GYNT.

Then I fired!

Down the buck came on the ground!
But the moment he had fallen
I was up astride his back,
On his left ear got my grip,
And was just in act of thrusting
With my knife into his gullet
Just behind his head—when, hi!
With a scream the ugly beggar
Scrambled up upon his feet
From my hand his sudden back-throw
Jerked my hunting-knife and scabbard,
Pinned me to his loins and held me
By the legs between his antlers
Like a pair of mighty pincers,
Then he rushed with bounds gigantic
Right along the ridge of Gendin!

AASE (*involuntarily*).

Christ in Heaven—!

PEER GYNT.

Have you ever
Been upon the ridge of Gendin?
Fully half a mile it stretches,
At the top as sheer and narrow
As a scythe-blade Looking downward—
Past the slopes and past the glaciers,
Past the grey ravines and gullies—
Either side you see the water
Wrapped in dark and gloomy slumber
Half a mile at least beneath you
Right along it he and I
Clove our passage through the air.
Never rode I such a steed!

Peer Gynt

Far ahead the peaks were sparkling
 As we rushed along Beneath us
 In the void the dusky eagles
 Fell away like motes in sunshine,
 You could see the ice-floes breaking
 On the banks, yet hear no murmur
 But the sprites that turn us dizzy
 Danced and sang and circled round us—
 I could hear and seemed to see them!

AASE (*swaying as if giddy*).

Heaven help us!

PEER GYNT

On a sudden,
 On the precipice's edge,
 From the hole where it lay hidden
 Almost at the reindeer's feet,
 Up a ptarmigan rose, cackling,
 Flapping with its wings in terror
 Then the reindeer, madly swerving,
 Gave a bound sky-high that sent us
 Plunging o'er the edge and downwards.

[AASE *totters and grasps a tree-trunk* PEER
 GYNT *continues*

Gloomy precipice behind us!—
 Fathomless abyss below us!
 First through clouds of mist we hurtled,
 Then a flock of gulls we scattered
 Wheeling through the air and screaming.
 Downward still and ever downwards!
 But beneath us something glistened
 Whitish, like a reindeer's belly.
 Mother, 'twas our own reflection
 Mirrored in the lake beneath us,
 Rushing up, it seemed, to meet us
 Just as swiftly and as madly
 As we downwards rushed towards it.

Peer Gynt

5

AASE (*gasping for breath*)

Peer! God help me—! Tell me quickly!

PEER GYNT

Buck from air and buck from water
Met with mighty splash together,
Scattering the foam around us.
Then at last we somehow managed
To the northern shore to struggle,
Buck, he swam and dragged me after—
So I got home——

AASE

But where's the reindeer?

PEER GYNT

I expect he's where I left him—

[*Snaps his fingers, turns on his heel and adds* ·
If you find him, you may keep him!]

AASE

And your neck you haven't broken?
Nor your legs? Nor smashed your backbone?
Praise and thanks to God be given
For His goodness that has saved you!
There's a rent across your breeches,
It is true, but that is scarcely
Worth a mention when one thinks
What the harm might well have been
From a leap like that of yours——

[*She suddenly pauses, stares at him with open
mouth, seems to struggle for speech and at
last breaks out*]

Oh, you lying little devil!—
Christ above us, what a liar!
All that rigmarole you told me
Is the tale of Gudbrand Glesne¹

¹ The tale is told in Asbjornsen's *Norske Huldre-Eventyr*, from another tale in which collection Ibsen derived the germ of his "Peer Gynt" idea

Peer Gynt

That I heard when I was twenty
 'Twas to him that all this happened,
 Not to you, you——

PEER GYNT

Yes, it did;
 History repeats itself

AASE

Lies, I know, can be so furbished
 And disguised in gorgeous wrappings
 That their skinny carcasses
 Not a soul would recognize
 That's what you've been doing now,
 With your wonderful adventures—
 Eagles' wings, and all that nonsense—
 Making up a pack of lies,
 Tales of breathless risk and danger,
 Till one can no longer tell
 What one knows and what one doesn't.

PEER GYNT

If a man said that to me,
 I would beat him to a jelly.

AASE (*in tears*).

Would to God that I were dead
 And buried in the cold black earth!
 Prayers and tears have no effect.
 You're a hopeless ne'er-do-well!

PEER GYNT

Dearest pretty little mother,
 Every word you say is true;
 So be gay and happy——

AASE

Pshaw!
 Don't talk nonsense How could I

Be happy, if I wanted to,
With such a pig as you for son?
Don't you think it's pretty hard
For a poor weak widow never
To feel anything but shame? [*Weeps again*
How much is there left of all
That your grandfather enjoyed
In his days of comfort? Where
Are the well-filled money-bags
Left by good old Rasmus Gynt?
'Twas your father emptied them,
Pouring money out like sand—
Buying land in all directions—
Gilded coach to ride about in
Where's the stuff so freely wasted
At the famous winter banquet,
When each guest sent glass and bottle
Crash against the wall behind him?

PEER GYNT

Where are the snows of yester year?

AASE

Hold your tongue when I am speaking!
See the farmhouse—scarce a window
But is smashed and stuffed with dish-clout,
Scarce a hedge or fence is standing,
No protection for the cattle
From the wind and wet, the meadows
And the fields all lying fallow,
Every month distraint on something—

PEER GYNT

That's enough of dismal wailing!
Often when our luck's been drooping
It has grown as strong as ever

AASE

Where it grew, the soil is poisoned
Peer, you certainly don't lack

Good opinion of yourself
 You are just as brisk and bumptious,
 Just as pert, as when the Parson
 Who had come from Copenhagen
 Asked you what your Christian name was,
 Telling you that where he came from
 Lots of men of highest station
 Would be glad to be as clever,
 And your father was so grateful
 For his amiable praises
 That a horse and sledge he gave him.
 Ah me! All went well in those days.
 Parsons, Captains and such people,
 Dropping in to see us daily—
 Filling up with drink and victuals
 Until they were nearly bursting
 But it's when your fortunes alter
 That you get to know your neighbours
 Since the day when "rich John Gynt"
 Took the road with pedlar's pack,
 Not a soul has e'er been near us

[Wipes her eyes with her apron]

You're a stout and strapping fellow—
 You should be a staff supporting
 Your old mother in her troubles
 You should work the farm for profit,
 And look after all the little
 That your father left behind him *[Weeps again.]*
 Heaven knows, it's precious little
 Use you've been to me, you rascal
 When you are at home, you're loafing
 By the fire, or grubbing idly
 In the ashes and the embers,
 When you're in the town you frighten
 All the girls you meet at dances,
 So that I'm ashamed to own you—
 Fighting with the lowest tramps—

PEER GYNT *(moving away from her).*

Let me be!

Peer Gynt

9

AASE (*following him*).

Can you deny
You were foremost in the brawling
In that dog-fight of a scrimmage
Down at Lunde? Who but you
Cracked the blacksmith Aslak's arm?
Or at any rate disjointed
One of his ten fingers for him?

PEER GYNT

Who has stuffed you up with that?

AASE (*hotly*)

Why, the cotters heard his howls!

PEER GYNT (*rubbing his elbow*).

Yes—but it was I that howled.

AASE

What!

PEER GYNT

Yes, mother, *I* got thrashed

AASE

What!

PEER GYNT

Well, he's a lusty chap.

AASE

Who is?

PEER GYNT

Aslak—as I felt!

AASE

Shame! I'd like to spit upon you!
To let such a scurvy swiller,
Such a worthless drunken rascal,

Peer Gynt

Beat you! *[Weeps again]*
Often I've endured
Shame and scorn on your account,
But that this disgrace should happen
Is the very worst of all
If he ~~is~~ a lusty fellow,
Need that mean that you're a weakling?

PEER GYNT (*with a laugh*).
Well, it doesn't seem to matter
If I beat, or if I'm beaten—
Either way you start your wailing.
You may cheer up——

AASE
Are you lying
Now again?

PEER GYNT
Yes, just this once;
So you may as well stop crying
[Clenches his left hand]
See, 'twas with this pair of pincers
That I bent the blacksmith double,
While my right hand was my hammer——

AASE
Oh, you brawler! You will bring me
To my grave by your behaviour!

PEER GYNT
Nonsense! You're worth something better—
Better twenty thousand times!
Little, homely, dainty mother,
Just believe what I am saying
All the town shall do you honour;
Only wait till I have done
Something—something really great!

Peer Gynt

11

AASE (*contemptuously*).

You!

PEER GYNT

Who knows what lies before him!

AASE

If you ever know enough
To mend your breeches when they're torn,
'Tis the most that I could hope for!

PEER GYNT (*hotly*)

I'll be a King, an Emperor!

AASE

Oh, God help me! Now he's losing
What was left him of his wits!

PEER GYNT

Yes, I shall! Just give me time!

AASE

Of course! As the old proverb runs,
Everything comes to him that waits.

PEER GYNT

Mother, you shall see

AASE

Be quiet!

You are as mad as mad can be.
After all, it's true enough
Something might have come of you
If you'd thought of something else
But your stupid lies and nonsense
Hægstad's daughter fancied you,
And you might have won the game
If you'd rightly gone to work——

Peer Gynt

PEER GYNT

Do you think so?

AASE

The old man
Is too weak to stand against her.
He is obstinate enough
In a way, but in the end
It is Ingrid takes the lead,
And where *she* goes, step by step
The old hunk comes stumbling after
[*Begins to cry again*]
Ah, Peer—a richly dowered girl,
Heir to his lands, just think of it
You might, if only you had liked,
In bridegroom's finery be dressed
Instead of in these dirty rags!

PEER GYNT (*quickly*)

Come on, I'll be a suitor now.

AASE

Where?

PEER GYNT.

Why, at Hægstad!

AASE

Ah, poor boy,
The right of way is barred to you.

PEER GYNT.

What do you mean?

AASE

Alas, alas!
You've lost the moment—lost your chance—

Peer Gynt

13

PEER GYNT

How's that?

AASE (*sobbing*)

While you were on the hills,
Riding your reindeer through the air,
Mads Moen went and won the girl

PEER GYNT

What? He? That guy the girls all laugh at?

AASE

Yes Now she's betrothed to him.

PEER GYNT

Just wait till I have harnessed up
The cart—— [*Turns to go*]

AASE

You needn't take the trouble.
The wedding is to-morrow

PEER GYNT

Pooh!

I'll get there by this evening.

AASE

Fie! Do you want to make things worse?
Just think how everyone will mock us!

PEER GYNT

Cheer up! All will turn out right
[*Shouting and laughing at the same time*]
No, mother! We won't take the cart,
We haven't time to put the mare in
[*Lifts her off her feet.*]

AASE.

Let me alone!

Peer Gynt

PEER GYNT

No, in my arms
 You shall be carried to the wedding!
[Wades out into the water]

AASE

Help! Help! Oh, Heaven protect me!—Peer,
 We'll drown——

PEER GYNT

Oh no, we shan't—I'm born
 To meet a better death.

AASE

That's true,
 You'll probably be hanged *[Pulls his hair]*
 You beast!

PEER GYNT

You'd best keep quiet, for just here
 The bottom's smooth and slippery.

AASE

Ass!

PEER GYNT

Yes, abuse me if you like,
 Words don't do any harm Aha!
 The bottom's sloping upwards now——

AASE

Don't lose your hold of me!

PEER GYNT.

Gee up!
 We'll play at Peer and Reindeer now! *[Prances]*
 I am the reindeer, you are Peer!

AASE

I'm sure I don't know what I am!

PEER GYNT

See here, now—here's an even bottom

[*Wades to the bank.*]

Now give your steed a pretty kiss

To thank him for the ride you've had.

AASE (*boxing his ears*).

That's the thanks I'll give him!

PEER GYNT.

Wow!

That's a scurvy sort of tip.

AASE.

Put me down!

PEER GYNT.

Not till we get

To where the wedding is afoot

You are so clever, you must be

My spokesman—talk to the old fool—

Tell him Mads Moen is a sot—

AASE.

Put me down!

PEER GYNT

And tell him, too,

The sort of lad that Peer Gynt is.

AASE.

Yes, you may take your oath I will!

A pretty character I'll give you!

I'll draw a faithful portrait, too,—

And all your devil's pranks and antics
I'll tell them of—in every detail——

PEER GYNT

Oh, will you!

AASE (*kicking him in her temper*)

I won't hold my tongue
Till the old man sets his dog
Upon you, as upon a tramp!

PEER GYNT

Ah, then I think I'll go alone.

AASE

All right, but I shall follow you!

PEER GYNT

Dear mother, you're not strong enough.

AASE

Not strong enough? I'm so worked up
That I could smash a heap of stones!
Oh, I could make a meal of flints!
So put me down!

PEER GYNT

Yes, if you promise——

AASE.

Nothing! I'm going there with you,
And they shall know the sort you are!

PEER GYNT.

Oh no, you won't; you'll stay behind.

AASE

Never! I'm going there with you

PEER GYNT.

Oh no, you aren't

AASE

What will you do?

PEER GYNT

I'll put you on the mill-house roof!

[Puts her up there. She screams.]

AASE

Lift me down!

PEER GYNT

If you will listen——

AASE

Bah!

PEER GYNT

Now, little mother, listen——

AASE *(throwing a bit of turf thatch at him)*

Lift me down this moment, Peer!

PEER GYNT

If I dared I would, indeed *[Goes nearer to her.]*

Remember to sit still and quiet——

Not to kick your legs about,

Nor the tiles to break or loosen——

Or an accident may happen,

And you might fall off.

AASE

You beast

PEER GYNT

Don't shift!

Peer Gynt

AASE

I wish you'd been shifted
Up the chimney, like a changeling!¹

PEER GYNT.

Mother! Shame!

AASE

Pooh!

PEER GYNT.

You should rather
Give your blessing on my journey
Will you?

AASE

I'll give you a thrashing,
Big as you are!

PEER GYNT

Oh well, good-bye!
Only have patience, mother dear,
I shan't be long
*[Is going, but turns, lifts a warning finger,
and says*

But don't forget
You mustn't try to move from there! *[Goes.*

AASE

Peer!—Heaven help me, he is gone!
Reindeer-rider! Liar! Hi!
Will you listen?—No, he's off
Over the meadows *[Screams.*

Help! I'm giddy!
*[Two OLD WOMEN, with sacks on their backs,
come down the path towards the mill*

¹ She alludes to a Norwegian superstition that "change lings" left by the fairies can be blown up the chimney.

Peer Gynt

19

FIRST OLD WOMAN.
Who's that screaming?

AASE

Me!

SECOND OLD WOMAN
You have had a lift in life! Why, Aase,

AASE
One that won't do me much good—
I'll be booked for heaven directly!

FIRST OLD WOMAN.
Pleasant journey!

AASE
Fetch a ladder!
Get me down! That devil Peer——

SECOND OLD WOMAN.
What, your son?

AASE
Now you can say
You have seen how he behaves.

FIRST OLD WOMAN.
We'll bear witness

AASE
Only help me—
Help me to get straight to Hægstad——

SECOND OLD WOMAN
Is he there?

Peer Gynt

FIRST OLD WOMAN.

You'll be revenged,
The blacksmith's going to the party.

AASE (*wringing her hands*)

Oh, God help me! My poor boy!
They will murder him between them!

FIRST OLD WOMAN

Ah, we know that lot quite well,
You may bet that's what will happen!

SECOND OLD WOMAN

You can see she's lost her senses
[*Calls up the hill*
Eivind! Anders! Hi! come here!

A MAN'S VOICE

What?

SECOND OLD WOMAN.

Peer Gynt has put his mother
Up upon the mill-house roof!

SCENE II

(SCENE.—*A little hill covered with bushes and heather. The high-road, shut off by a fence, runs at the back. PEER GYNT comes down a foot-path, goes quickly up to the fence, and stands looking out over the landscape beyond.*)

PEER GYNT.

Yonder lies Hægstad I shall soon be at it.

[*Climbs half over the fence, then stops and considers*
I wonder if Ingrid's sitting all alone there?

[*Shades his eyes and looks along the road*
No. Folk with gifts are swarming up like midges
Perhaps I had better turn and go no farther.

[*Draws his leg back over the fence*

Peer Gynt

21

There'll be their grins behind my back for certain—
Whispers that seem to burn their way right through
you

*[Moves a few steps away from the fence, and begins
absently plucking leaves]*

If only I'd a good strong drink inside me—
Or could just slip into the house unnoticed—
Or if no one knew me— No, some good strong liquor
Would be best, their laughter wouldn't hurt then

*[Looks round suddenly as if startled, then hides
among the bushes Some COUNTRY FOLK,
carrying presents, pass along the road on their
way to the wedding]*

A MAN (*in conversation*).

With a drunkard for father, and a poor thing of a
mother——

A WOMAN

Yes, it's no wonder the boy is such a wastrel

*[They pass on After a little, PEER GYNT comes
forward, blushing with shame, and peeps after
them]*

PEER GYNT (*softly*)

Was it of me they gossiped? *[With a forced shrug]*
Oh well, let them!

Anyway they can't kill me with their gossip
*[Throws himself down on the heather slope, and
for some time lies on his back with his hands
under his head, staring up into the sky.]*

What a curious cloud! That bit's like a horse,
And there is its rider and saddle and bridle,
And behind them an old crone is riding a broomstick
[Laughs quietly to himself]
That's mother! She's scolding and screaming "You
beast!"

Hi! Peer, come back!" *[Gradually closes his eyes]*
Yes, now she is frightened.—

There rides Peer Gynt at the head of his henchmen,
 His charger gold-shod, silver-crested his harness.
 Peer carries gauntlets and sabre and scabbard,
 Wears a long coat with a fine silky lining
 Splendid the men in his retinue following,
 But there's not one sits his charger as proudly,
 Not one that glitters like him in the sunshine
 The people in groups by the wayside are gathered,
 Lifting their hats as they stare up in wonder,
 The women are curtsying, everyone knows it is
 Kaiser Peer Gynt and his thousand retainers
 Half-guinea pieces and glittering shillings
 Are strewn on the roadway as if they were pebbles,
 Rich as a lord is each man in the parish
 Peer Gynt rides over the seas in his glory,
 Engelland's Prince on the shore is awaiting,
 And Engelland's maidens all ready to welcome him.
 Engelland's nobles and Engelland's Kaiser
 Rise from their seats as he deigns to approach them
 Lifting his crown, speaks the Kaiser in welcome——

ASLAK THE SMITH

*(to some others, as they pass by on the other side
 of the fence)*

Hullo! Look here! Why, it's Peer Gynt the drunkard!

PEER GYNT *(half rising)*.

What, Kaiser——!

ASLAK *(leaning on the fence and grinning)*.

Get up on your feet, my young fellow!

PEER GYNT.

What the devil—? The blacksmith! Well, pray,
 what do *you* want?

ASLAK *(to the others)*

He hasn't got over our spree down at Lundë.

PEER GYNT (*springing up*).
Just let me alone!

ASLAK

That I will But, young fellow,
What have you done with yourself since we parted?
It's six weeks ago Have the troll-folk been at you?

PEER GYNT

I can tell you I've done something wonderful, Aslak.

ASLAK (*winking to the others*)

Let's hear it then, Peer!

PEER GYNT

No, it won't interest you

ASLAK

Shall we see you at Hægstad?

PEER GYNT

You won't

ASLAK

Why, the gossip
Says there was a time you were fancied by Ingrid

PEER GYNT

You dirty-faced crow!

ASLAK.

Now don't get in a temper!
If the girl *has* refused you, there surely are others
Remember the goodly John Gynt was your father!
Come along to the farm! There'll be girls at the
wedding
As tender as lambkins, and widows well seasoned—

PEER GYNT.

Go to hell!

ASLAK

You'll be sure to find someone who'll have you.
Good evening I'll give the bride all your good wishes!

[They go off, laughing and whispering PEER stands for a moment looking after them, then tosses his head and turns half round]

PEER GYNT

Well, Ingrid at Hægstad may wed whom she pleases,
For all that I care! I shall be just as happy!

[Looks down at his clothes]
Breeches all torn—all dirty and tattered
If only I had something new to put on me—

[Stamps his foot on the slope]
If I only could carve at their breasts like a butcher,
And tear out the scorn and contempt that they show
me!

[Looks round suddenly]
What was that? Who is it that's laughing behind
there?

I certainly thought that I heard— No, there's no one
I'll go home to mother

[Moves off, but stops again and listens in the direction of Hægstad]

The dance is beginning!
[Stares and listens; moves step by step towards the fence, his eyes glisten; he rubs his hands down his legs]

How the girls swarm! Seven or eight of them
There for each man! Oh, death and damnation,
I must go to the party!—But what about mother,
Sitting up there on the roof of the mill-house—?

[His eyes wander towards the fence again; he skips and laughs]

Haha! I can hear them out dancing a Halling!¹
Guttorm's the boy!—how he handles his fiddle!

¹ A boisterous country-dance.

Hear it sparkle and flash like a stream at a waterfall!
And think of the girls—all the pick of the neighbour-
hood—

Yes, death and damnation, I'm off to the party!
[Vaults over the fence and goes off down the road]

SCENE III

(SCENE —*The courtyard of the farm at Hægstad. The farm buildings are at the back. A number of guests are assembled, and a lively dance is in progress on the grass. The FIDDLER is seated on a table. The STEWARD stands in the doorway. Cook-maids pass to and fro between the buildings. The older folk are sitting about, gossiping.*)

A WOMAN

(*joining a group of guests who are sitting on some logs*)

The bride? To be sure she is crying a little,
But that's not a thing that is out of the usual

THE STEWARD (*to another group*)

Now then, my friends, you must empty your noggins!

A MAN

Ah, thank you kindly—you fill up too quickly!

A YOUTH

(*as he flies past the FIDDLER, holding a girl by the hand*)

That's the way, Guttorm! Don't spare your fiddle-
strings!

THE GIRL

Scrape till it echoes out over the meadows!

OTHER GIRLS

(*standing in a ring round a youth who is dancing*)

That's a good step!

A GIRL

He's lusty and nimble!

THE YOUTH (*dancing*)

The roof here is high and the walls far apart, you know!¹

[*The BRIDEGROOM comes up whimpering to his FATHER, who is standing talking to some others, and pulls at his jacket*

THE BRIDEGROOM

Father, she won't! She is not being nice to me!

HIS FATHER

What won't she do?

THE BRIDEGROOM

She has locked herself in.

HIS FATHER

Well, you must see if you can't find the key.

THE BRIDEGROOM.

But I don't know how.

HIS FATHER

Oh, you are a nuisance!

[*Turns to the others again The BRIDEGROOM drifts across the courtyard*

A BOY (*coming from behind the house*).

I say, you girls! Now things will be livelier!
Peer Gynt's arrived!

¹ His allusion is to the fact that in dancing the Halling a great feat is to kick as high as the rafters of the roof, but he is dancing in the open air.

ASLAK (*who has just come on the scene*)
Who invited him?

THE STEWARD
No one did
[*Goes into the house*]

ASLAK (*to the girls*)
If he should speak to you, don't seem to hear him

A GIRL (*to the others*)
No, we'll pretend that we don't even see him
[*PEER GYNT comes in, hot and eager, stops in front of the group and rubs his hands*]

PEER GYNT
Who is the nimblest girl of the lot of you?

A GIRL (*whom he has approached*).
Not I.

ANOTHER
Nor I.

A THIRD
No, nor I either

PEER GYNT (*to a fourth*)
Then *you* dance with me, for want of a better

THE GIRL (*turning away*)
I haven't time.

PEER GYNT (*to a fifth*).
You, then

THE GIRL (*moving away*).
I'm off homeward.

PEER GYNT

Homeward to-night? Are you out of your senses?

ASLAK (*after a little, in a low voice*)

Peer, she has taken an old man to dance with

PEER GYNT (*turning quickly to another man*).

Where are the disengaged girls?

THE MAN

Go and look for them

[*He moves away from PEER GYNT, who has suddenly become subdued. He glances furtively and shyly at the group. They all look at him, but no one speaks. He approaches other groups. Wherever he goes there is a sudden silence, when he moves away, they smile and look after him.*]

PEER GYNT (*in a low voice*).

Glances—and thoughts and smiles that are cutting—
Jarring on one like a file on a saw-blade!

[*He sidles along by the palings. SOLVEIG, holding little HELGA by the hand, comes into the courtyard with her PARENTS.*]

A MAN (*to another, close to PEER GYNT*).

These are the newcomers

THE OTHER

Living out westward?

FIRST MAN.

Yes, out at Hedal

THE OTHER.

Ah, yes—of course they are

[PEER GYNT *advances to meet the newcomers, points to SOLVEIG and addresses her* FATHER

PEER GYNT

May I dance with your daughter?

THE FATHER

You may, but before that

We must go indoors and give our hosts greeting
[*They go in.*]

THE STEWARD

(*to PEER GYNT, offering him a drink*)

As you're here, I suppose you must wet your whistle

PEER GYNT (*looking fixedly after the newcomers*)

Thanks, I'm for dancing I don't feel thirsty.

[*The STEWARD leaves him* PEER GYNT *looks towards the house and laughs*

How fair she is! Was there ever a fairer?

Eyes glancing down at her shoes and white apron—
And the way she held on to her mother's skirt, too—
And carried her prayer-book wrapped in a kerchief—!
I must have a look at her!

[*Is going into the house, but is met by several*
YOUTHS *coming out*

A YOUTH

What, off already

Away from the dance?

PEER GYNT.

No

THE YOUTH

You're on the wrong road, then!

[*Takes him by the shoulders to turn him round*

PEER GYNT

Let me get past!

THE YOUTH

Are you frightened of Aslak?

PEER GYNT

I, frightened?

THE YOUTH

Remember what happened at Lunde!

[The group laugh and move off to where the dancing is going on SOLVEIG comes to the door]

SOLVEIG

Are you the boy who wanted to dance with me?

PEER GYNT

Of course I am Can't you tell by the look of me?
Come on!

SOLVEIG

But I mustn't go far—mother said so.

PEER GYNT

Mother said? Mother said? Were you only born
yesterday?

SOLVEIG

Don't laugh——

PEER GYNT

It is true you are almost a kiddie still
Are you grown up?

SOLVEIG

I shall soon be confirmed, you know

PEER GYNT

Tell me your name—then we can talk easier

SOLVEIG

My name is Solveig Tell me what yours is.

PEER GYNT.

Peer Gynt.

SOLVEIG (*drawing back her hand from his*).

Oh, heavens!

PEER GYNT

Why, what is the matter?

SOLVEIG

My garter's come loose, I must tie it more carefully
[*Leaves him.*]

THE BRIDEGROOM (*pulling at his MOTHER'S sleeve*).
Mother, she won't——

HIS MOTHER

She won't? What won't she do?

THE BRIDEGROOM

Mother, she won't——

HIS MOTHER.

What?

THE BRIDEGROOM

Unbar the door to me!

HIS FATHER (*in a low and angry voice*)

You're only fit to be tied in a stable, sir!

HIS MOTHER

Poor boy, don't scold him—he'll be all right presently.
[*A YOUTH comes in, with a crowd of others who
have been dancing*]

THE YOUTH.
Brandy, Peer?

PEER GYNT.
No.

YOUTH
Just a drop!

PEER GYNT
Have you got any?

YOUTH
Maybe I have *[Pulls out a flask and drinks]*
Ah, that's got a bite to it!
Well?

PEER GYNT.
Let me try it *[Drinks]*

SECOND YOUTH
And now have a pull at mine!

PEER GYNT.
No.

YOUTH
Oh, what rubbish! Don't be a simpleton!
Have a drink, Peer!

PEER GYNT
Well, give me a drop of it
[Drinks again]

A GIRL *(in an undertone)*.
Come, let's be off

PEER GYNT
Why, are you afraid of me?

YOUTH

Do you think there is any that isn't afraid of you?
You showed us what you could do, down at Lunde

PEER GYNT

I can do better than that if I'm roused, you know!

YOUTH (*whispering*).

Now he is getting on!

OTHERS (*making a ring round PEER*).

Come on, now—tell us, Peer,
What can you do?

PEER GYNT

Oh, I'll tell you to-morrow—

OTHERS

No!

Tell us to-night!

A GIRL

Can you show us some witchcraft, Peer?

PEER GYNT.

Ah, I can conjure the Devil!

A MAN

My grandmother,
She could do that long before I was born, they say.

PEER GYNT

Liar! What *I* can do, no one alive can do.
Why, once I conjured him into a nutshell,
Right through a worm-hole!

OTHERS (*laughing*)

Of course—we can guess that!

PEER GYNT

He swore and he wept and promised to give me
All sorts of good things——

ONE OF THE GROUP

But had to go into it?

PEER GYNT

Yes, and then, when I'd stopped up the worm-hole,
Lord! if you'd heard him buzzing and rumbling!

A GIRL

Fancy!

PEER GYNT

'Twas like a great bumble-bee buzzing.

THE GIRL

And pray have you got him still in the nutshell?

PEER GYNT

No, the old Devil got right clean away again
It is his fault the blacksmith dislikes me.

A BOY.

How's that?

PEER GYNT

Because I took him to the smithy
And asked the smith to crack the nutshell for me
He said he would I laid it on the anvil,
But you know Aslak's very heavy-handed,
And with a will he laid on with his hammer——

A VOICE FROM THE GROUP.

Did he kill the Devil?

PEER GYNT

No, he laid on stoutly,
But the Devil looked after himself and just vanished
Through ceiling and walls in a flame of fire

SEVERAL VOICES

And Aslak—?

PEER GYNT

Stood there with his hands well roasted
And since that day we have never been friendly
[General laughter]

VOICES

That's a fine rigmarole!

OTHERS

Easily his best one!

PEER GYNT

Do you suggest that I made it up?

A MAN

Oh no,
I know you didn't, for I've heard the story
Told by my grandfather——

PEER GYNT

Liar! It happened
To me, I tell you!

THE MAN

Oh, well—that's all right

PEER GYNT (*tossing his head*)

Pooh! I can ride through the clouds on horseback!
There are lots of fine things I can do, I tell you!
[Roars of laughter again.]

ONE OF THE GROUP.

Peer, let us see you ride clouds!

OTHERS

Yes, dear Peer—!

PEER GYNT

Oh, you won't need to beg me so humbly—
One day I'll ride like a storm o'er the lot of you!
The whole countryside shall fall at my feet!

AN OLDER MAN.

Why, now he's raving!

ANOTHER

Yes, the great booby!

A THIRD

The braggart!

A FOURTH.

The liar!

PEER GYNT (*threatening them*)

Just wait and you'll see, then!

A MAN (*half drunk*)

Yes, wait and you'll get your jacket well dusted!

OTHERS.

A good sound drubbing! A nice black eye, too!

[*The crowd disperses, the older ones angry and the
younger ones laughing and mocking him*]

THE BRIDEGROOM (*edging up to PEER*).

Peer, is it true you can ride through the clouds, then?

PEER GYNT (*shortly*)

Anything, Mads! I'm the boy, I can tell you!

THE BRIDEGROOM

I suppose you've a coat that will make you invisible?

PEER GYNT

An invisible hat, do you mean? Yes, I have one

[*Turns away from him SOLVEIG comes across the courtyard leading HELGA by the hand* PEER

GYNT *goes to meet them, looking happier*

Solveig! Ah, I am glad you have come to me!

[*Grasps her wrists*

Now I shall swing you round most nimbly!

SOLVEIG

Oh, let me go!

PEER GYNT.

Why?

SOLVEIG

You look so wildly.

PEER GYNT

The reindeer grows wild when summer's approaching
Come along, girl! Come, don't be sullen!

SOLVEIG (*drawing back her arm*)

No—no, I daren't

PEER GYNT.

Why?

SOLVEIG

No, you've been drinking

[*Moves away a little, with HELGA*

PEER GYNT

I wish I had stuck my knife in the lot of them!

THE BRIDEGROOM (*nudging PEER'S elbow*)

Can't you help me to get in there where the bride is?

PEER GYNT (*absently*).

The bride? Where is she?

THE BRIDEGROOM

In the loft

PEER GYNT

Oh, is she?

THE BRIDEGROOM

Oh, come, Peer—dear Peer—you might try to!

PEER GYNT

No, you must manage to do without me.

[*A thought strikes him. He says, softly and meaningly*

Ingrid! The loft!

[*Goes up to SOLVEIG*

Have you made up your mind, then?

[*SOLVEIG turns to get away, but he bars her path*

I look like a tramp, and so you're ashamed of me.

SOLVEIG (*hastily*)

Oh no, you don't, that isn't the truth.

PEER GYNT.

It is.

And it's because you think I am fuddled,

But that was for spite, because you had hurt me.

Come along, then!

SOLVEIG

I daren't, if I wanted to.

PEER GYNT

Who are you frightened of?

SOLVEIG

Mostly of father.

PEER GYNT.

Your father? Oh, yes—he's one of the solemn ones!
Sanctimonious, isn't he? Answer me!

SOLVEIG

What shall I say?

PEER GYNT.

Perhaps he's a preacher?

And you and your mother the same, I dare say?
Are you going to answer me?

SOLVEIG.

Let me alone

PEER GYNT

I won't! [*In a low but hard and threatening voice*
I can turn myself into a troll!
I shall come and stand by your bed at midnight,
And if you hear something that's hissing and spitting,
Don't you suppose it's your cat you are hearing
It is I! And I'll drain your life-blood out of you,
And your little sister—I'll eat her up,
For I turn to a were-wolf whenever the night falls,
Your loins and your back I'll bite all over—
[*Changes his tone suddenly and entreats her anxiously*
Dance with me, Solveig!

SOLVEIG (*looking darkly at him*)

Ah—now you are horrid

[*Goes into the house*

THE BRIDEGROOM (*drifting up to PEER again*).
I'll give you an ox, if you'll help me!

PEER GYNT

Come!

[*They go behind the house At the same moment
a crowd comes back from dancing, most of
them drunk Noise and confusion SOLVEIG,
HELGA and their PARENTS come out to the door*

THE STEWARD

(*to ASLAK, who is in the front of the crowd*).

Be quiet!

ASLAK (*pulling off his coat*)

No, here we'll settle the matter.
Peer Gynt or I shall get a thrashing

SOME OF THE CROWD.

Yes, let them fight!

OTHERS

No, no, let them argue!

ASLAK

No, we must fight, we want no arguing.

SOLVEIG'S FATHER

Be quiet, man!

HELGA

Will he hit him, mother?

A BOY

It's better fun with his lies to tease him!

ANOTHER

Kick him out, I say!

A THIRD

No, spit in his face!

A FOURTH (*to ASLAK*)

Are you backing out?

ASLAK (*throwing away his coat*)

I'll murder the beggar!

SOLVEIG'S MOTHER (*to SOLVEIG*).

You see now what they think of the booby

[AASE *comes in, with a cudgel in her hand*

AASE

Is my son here? He shall have such a drubbing!

Just wait and you'll see what a thrashing I'll give
him!

ASLAK (*turning up his shirt-sleeves*).

No, *your* little body's too weak for that.

VOICES.

Aslak will thrash him!

OTHERS.

Slash him!

ASLAK (*spitting on his hands and nodding to AASE*)

Hang him!

AASE

What? Hang my Peer? Just try, if you dare!

This old Aase's got teeth and claws!—

Where is he?

[*Calls across the courtyard*

Peer!

THE BRIDEGROOM (*running in*).

Oh, God in Heaven!

Come, father! Mother!

HIS FATHER

Why, what's the matter?

THE BRIDEGROOM.

Oh, Peer Gynt! I—!

AASE (*with a scream*)

What? What? Have you killed him?

THE BRIDEGROOM

No, Peer Gynt—! Look, up there on the hillside!

VOICES.

With the bride!

AASE (*letting her cudgel fall*).

The beast!

ASLAK (*in amazement*)Where the hill is steepest
He's climbing, by God!—like a mountain goat!THE BRIDEGROOM (*in tears*)

And carrying her under his arm like a pig!

AASE (*shaking her fist at PEER*)I wish he would fall and—! [*Screams anxiously*]
Take care of your footing!

INGRID'S FATHER

(*coming out bareheaded and white with rage*).

I'll have his life for his rape of the bride!

AASE

No, may God punish me if I let you!

ACT II

SCENE I

(SCENE —A narrow track high up on the mountain-side It is early morning PEER GYNT comes hurriedly and sulkily along the path INGRID, wearing some of her bridal ornaments, is trying to hold him back)

PEER GYNT

Get away!

INGRID (*in tears*)

What, after this?

Where to?

PEER GYNT

Anywhere you like.

INGRID (*wringing her hands*).

What deceit!

PEER GYNT

It's no use railing.

We must go our own ways—both

INGRID

Think what binds us two together!

PEER GYNT

Oh, the devil take all thinking!
And the devil take all women—
Except one—!

Peer Gynt

INGRID

And who is she?

PEER GYNT.

She's not you

INGRID

Who is it, then?

PEER GYNT

Get you back to where you came from!
Go back to your father!

INGRID

Dearest——

PEER GYNT

Pshaw!

INGRID

You surely can't be meaning
What you say

PEER GYNT

I can and do.

INGRID.

To ruin me, and then forsake me?

PEER GYNT

Well, what have you got to offer?

INGRID.

Hægstad farm, and something more.

PEER GYNT

Is your prayer-book in your kerchief?
Where's your mane of hair all golden?

Do you glance down at your apron?
Do you hold on to your mother
By her skirt? Come, answer!

INGRID

No; but——

PEER GYNT

Shall you go to Confirmation
Very shortly?

INGRID

No, but dearest——

PEER GYNT

Are your glances always bashful?
If I beg, can you deny me?

INGRID

Christ! I think he's lost his senses——!

PEER GYNT

Does one feel a holy feeling
When one sees you? Answer!

INGRID

No, but——

PEER GYNT

Then what matter what you offer?
[*Turns to go*]

INGRID (*confronting him*)

Remember it's a hanging matter
To forsake me now

PEER GYNT

So be it

INGRID

Rich you may be, and respected,
If you take me——

PEER GYNT

I can't do it.

INGRID (*bursting into tears*).

Oh, you tempted——

PEER GYNT

You were willing

INGRID

I was wretched

PEER GYNT

I was mad

INGRID (*threateningly*)

You'll pay a heavy price for this!

PEER GYNT

I should call the heaviest cheap.

INGRID

Is your mind made up?

PEER GYNT

Like stone

INGRID

Very well You'll see who'll win

[*Goes down the hill.*]

PEER GYNT

(*is silent for a little, then suddenly calls out*).

Oh, the devil take all thinking!

And the devil take all women!

INGRID (*turns her head and calls up mockingly*)
All but one!

PEER GYNT.

Yes, all but one.

[*They each go their way.*]

SCENE II

(SCENE —*By a mountain lake, on boggy moorland. A storm is blowing up AASE, in despair, is calling and searching in every direction SOLVEIG can scarcely keep pace with her Her PARENTS and HELGA are a little way behind AASE beats the air with her arms and tears her hair*)

AASE

Everything's against me with the might of anger!
The skies and the water and the hateful mountains!
Fogs from the skies are rolling to mislead him—
Treacherous waters will delude and drown him—
Mountains will crush or slip away beneath him—!
And all these people! They are out to kill him!
By God, they shall not! I can't do without him!
The oaf! To think the devil thus should tempt him!

[*Turns to SOLVEIG.*]

Ah, my girl, one simply can't believe it
He, who was always full of lies and nonsense—
He, who was only clever with his talking—
He, who had never done a thing worth telling—
He—! Oh, I want to laugh and cry together!
We were such friends in our need and troubles
For, you must know, my husband was a drunkard,
Made us a byword in the neighbours' gossip,
Brought all our good estate to rack and ruin,
While I and Peerkin sat at home together—
Tried to forget—we knew no better counsel,
I was too weak to stand up stoutly to it.

It is so hard to face the fate that's coming,
 And so one tries to shake one's sorrows off one,
 Or do one's best to rid one's mind of thinking
 Some fly to brandy, others try romancing,
 So we found comfort in the fairy stories
 All about trolls and princes and such cattle—
 Tales, too, of stolen brides—but who would ever
 Think that such stories in his mind would linger?

[Becomes terrified again]

Ah, what a screech! A nixie or a kelpie!
 Peer! Oh, my Peer!—Up there upon the hillock—!
[Runs up on to a little hillock and looks over the lake]
 SOLVEIG'S PARENTS come up to her
 Not a thing to be seen!

THE HUSBAND (*quietly*)

It is worst for him.

AASE (*in tears*)

Oh, Peer! my Peer! My own lost lamb!

THE HUSBAND (*nodding his head gently*).

Aye, lost indeed.

AASE

Say no such thing!

He is so clever, there's no one like him.

THE HUSBAND.

You foolish woman!

AASE

Oh yes, oh yes,

I may be foolish, but he is fine!

THE HUSBAND

(always quietly and with a gentle expression).

His heart is stubborn, his soul is lost.

AASE (*anxiously*)

No, no! God's not so hard as that!

THE HUSBAND

Do you think he feels the weight of his sinning?

AASE (*hastily*)

No—he can ride through the air on a reindeer!

THE WIFE

Christ! Are you mad?

THE HUSBAND

What are you saying?

AASE

There's nothing that is too great for him.
You'll see, if only he live to do it——

THE HUSBAND

'Twould be best to see him hang on the gallows.

AASE (*with a scream*)

Good God!

THE HUSBAND

When he's in the hangman's clutches
Perhaps his heart may turn to repentance

AASE (*confusedly*)

Your talk will make me dazed and giddy!
We must find him!

THE HUSBAND

Save his soul

AASE.

And body!

We must drag him out if he's in the marshes,
And ring church bells if the trolls have got him.

THE HUSBAND.

Ah! Here's a track——

AASE.

May God repay you

If you help me aright!

THE HUSBAND

'Tis our Christian duty

AASE

All the others are naught but heathens!

There was only one that would come and wander——

THE HUSBAND.

They knew him too well

AASE

He was much too good for them

[Wrings her hands]

And to think—to think his life is in danger!

THE HUSBAND.

Here's a footprint

AASE

That's the way we must go, then!

THE HUSBAND

We'll scatter and search below the pastures.

*[He and his wife go on]*SOLVEIG (*to AASE*)

Tell me some more

AASE (*wiping her eyes*)

About my son?

Peer Gynt

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SOLVEIG

Yes.

Tell me everything!

AASE (*smiling and holding her head up*)

Everything?

'Twould weary you!

SOLVEIG

You'd be sooner wearied

With telling me, than I with hearing

SCENE III

(SCENE —*Low treeless hills below the higher mountains, whose peaks show in the distance It is late in the day, and long shadows are falling PEER comes running in at full speed, and stops on a slope*)

PEER GYNT

They're after me now—the whole of the parish!
And everyone's taken his stick or his rifle
The old man from Hægstad is leading them, howling
It has soon got abroad that Peer Gynt is the quarry!
A different thing from a fight with the blacksmith!
This is life! All my muscles are strong as a bear's
[*Swings his arms about and leaps into the air*
To overthrow everything! Breast a waterfall!
Strike! Pull a fir-tree up by the roots!
This is life! It can harden and it can exalt!
To hell with all my trumpery lying!

[*Three COWHERD GIRLS run across the hill, shouting and singing*

THE GIRLS

Trond of Valfjeld! Baard and Kaare!
Listen, trolls! Would you sleep in our arms.

PEER GYNT

Who are you shouting for?

THE GIRLS

Trolls! Trolls! Trolls!

FIRST GIRL

Trond, come lovingly!

SECOND GIRL.

Come, lusty Baard!

THIRD GIRL

All the beds in our hut are empty!

FIRST GIRL.

Love is lusty!

SECOND GIRL.

And lustiness love!

THIRD GIRL.

When boys are lacking, one plays with trolls!

PEER GYNT

Where are your boys, then?

THE GIRLS (*with a burst of laughter*).

They can't come!

FIRST GIRL.

Mine called me dearest and sweetheart too,
Now he is wed to an elderly widow.

SECOND GIRL

Mine met a gipsy wench up at Lien,
Now they are both on the road together.

THIRD GIRL.

Mine made an end of our bastard brat,
Now on a stake his head is grinning

ALL THREE.

Trond of Valfjeld! Baard and Kaare!
Listen, trolls! Would you sleep in our arms?

PEER GYNT (*leaping suddenly amongst them*)
I'm a three-headed troll, and the boy for three girls!

THE GIRLS

Can you tackle the job?

PEER GYNT

You shall see if I cant

FIRST GIRL

To the hut! To the hut!

SECOND GIRL

We have mead!

PEER GYNT

Let it flow!

THIRD GIRL

This Saturday night not a bed shall be empty!

SECOND GIRL (*kissing PEER*).

He gleams and glitters like glowing iron!

THIRD GIRL (*kissing PEER*)

Like a baby's eyes from the blackest tarn!

PEER GYNT (*dancing with them*).

Dismal bodings and wanton thoughts,
Laughter in eyes and tears in throat!

THE GIRLS

(making long noses at the mountain-tops, and shouting and singing)

Trond of Valfjeld! Baard and Kaare!
Listen, trolls! Did you sleep in our arms?
[*They dance away over the hills with PEER
GYNT between them*]

SCENE IV

(SCENE —Among the mountains The snowy peaks are gleaming in the sunset PEER GYNT comes in, looking wild and distraught)

PEER GYNT

Palace o'er palace is rising!
See, what a glittering gate!
Stop! Will you stop!—It is moving
Farther and farther away!
The cock on the weather-vane's lifting
Its wings as if for a flight—
Into rifts of rock it has vanished,
And the mountain's barred and locked.
What are these roots and tree-trunks
That grow from the clefts of the ridge?
They are heroes with feet of herons—
And now they are vanished away.
A shimmer like strips of rainbow
My sight and mind assails
Are they bells that I hear in the distance?
What's weighing my eyebrows down?
Oh, how my forehead's aching—
As if I'd a red-hot band
Pressing—! But who the devil
Put it there I don't know! [*Sinks down*]
A flight o'er the ridge at Gendin—
Romancing and damned lies!

Over the steepest walls with
The bride—and drunk for a day—
Hawks and kites to fight with—
Threatened by trolls and the like—
Sporting with crazy lasses—
Damned romancing and lies!

[Gazes upwards for a long time]

There hover two brown eagles,
The wild geese fly to the south,
And I have to trudge and stumble
Knee-deep in mud and mire *[Springs up]*
I'll go with them! Cleanse my foulness
In a bath of the keenest wind!
Up aloft I'll lave my stains in
That glittering christening-font!
I'll away out over the pastures;
I'll fly till I'm pure and clean—
Fly o'er the ocean waters
O'er the Prince of Engelland's head!
Ah, you may stare, you maidens,
I'm flying, but not to you.
It's of no use your waiting—!
Yet I might swoop below—

Why, where are the two brown eagles?

They've gone to the devil, I think!

See, there's the end of a gable,
It's rising bit by bit,
It's growing out of the rubbish—
See, now the door stands wide!
Aha! I recognize it,
Grandfather's farm new built!
Gone are the clouts from the casements
And the fence that was tumbling down,
Lights gleam from every window,
They are feasting there within
Listen! The Parson's tapping
His knife upon his glass,
The Captain's hurled his bottle
And broken the mirror to smash.
Let them waste and let them squander!

Hush, mother—there's plenty more!
 It's rich John Gynt that is feasting;
 Hurrah for the race of Gynt!
 What's all the bustle and rumpus?
 What are the cries and shouts?
 "Where's Peer?" the Captain is calling—
 The Parson would drink my health—
 Go in, then, Peer, for the verdict,
 You shall have it in songs of praise.
 Great, Peer, were thy beginnings,
 And in great things thou shalt end
*[He leaps forward, but runs his nose against a rock,
 falls and remains lying on the ground]*

SCENE V

(SCENE—A mountain-side, with trees in full leaf through which the wind is whispering. Stars are twinkling through the branches. Birds are singing in the tree-tops. A WOMAN IN GREEN crosses the slope. After her follows PEER GYNT, performing all sorts of amorous antics.)

THE WOMAN IN GREEN
(stopping and turning round).

Is it true?

PEER GYNT *(drawing his finger across his throat)*

As true as my name is Peer,
 As true as that you are a lovely woman!
 Will you have me? You'll see how nice I can be;
 You shall never have to weave or to spin,
 You shall be fed till you're ready to burst,
 I promise I never will pull your hair—

THE WOMAN IN GREEN.

Nor strike me, either?

PEER GYNT

No, is it likely?
We sons of kings don't strike our women.

THE WOMAN IN GREEN.

A king's son?

PEER GYNT

Yes

THE WOMAN IN GREEN

I'm the Dovre-King's daughter

PEER GYNT

Are you really? Well, well! How suitable!

THE WOMAN IN GREEN

In the mountains my father has his castle

PEER GYNT

And my mother a larger one, let me tell you

THE WOMAN IN GREEN

Do you know my father? His name's King Brose

PEER GYNT

Do you know my mother? Her name's Queen Aase

THE WOMAN IN GREEN

The mountains reel when my father's angry.

PEER GYNT

If my mother begins to scold, they totter.

THE WOMAN IN GREEN

My father can kick to the highest rafters

PEER GYNT

My mother can ride through the fiercest river.

THE WOMAN IN GREEN

Besides those rags have you other clothing?

PEER GYNT

Ah, you should see my Sunday garments!

THE WOMAN IN GREEN

My week-day garments are gold and silver.

PEER GYNT

It looks to me more like tow and grasses.

THE WOMAN IN GREEN

Yes There's just one thing to remember:
We mountain folk have an ancient custom;
All that we have has a double shape
So when you come to my father's palace
It would not be in the least surprising
If you were inclined to think it merely
A heap of ugly stones and rubbish.

PEER GYNT

That's just the same as it is with us!
You may think our gold all rust and mildew,
And mistake each glittering window-pane
For a bundle of worn-out clouts and stockings.

THE WOMAN IN GREEN

Black looks like white, and ugly like fair.

PEER GYNT.

Big looks like little, and filthy like clean

THE WOMAN IN GREEN (*falling on his neck*)
Oh, Peer, I see we are splendidly suited!

PEER GYNT

Like the hair to the comb—or the leg to the breeches

THE WOMAN IN GREEN (*calling over the hillside*)
My steed! My steed! My wedding steed!
[*A gigantic pig comes running in, with a rope's end
for a halter and an old sack for a saddle*
PEER GYNT *swings himself on to its back and
seats the WOMAN IN GREEN in front of him*

PEER GYNT

Houp-là! We'll gallop right into the palace!
Come up! Come up, my noble charger!

THE WOMAN IN GREEN (*caressingly*)
And to think I was feeling so sad and lonely—
One never can tell what is going to happen!

PEER GYNT (*whipping up the pig, which trots off*)
Great folk are known by the steeds they ride!

SCENE VI

(SCENE —*The Royal Hall of the King of the Trolls.
A great assembly of TROLL COURTIERs, BROWNIES and
GNOMES. The TROLL KING is seated on his throne,
with crown and sceptre. His children and nearest
relations sit on either side of him. PEER GYNT is
standing before him. There is a great uproar in the
hall.*)

TROLL COURTIERs

Slay him! The Christian's son has tempted
The fairest daughter of our King!

Peer Gynt

A YOUNG TROLL.

Let me slash him on the fingers!

ANOTHER

May I tear his hair out for him?

A TROLL MAIDEN

Let me bite him on the buttocks!

TROLL WITCH (*with a ladle*).

Let me boil him down for broth!

ANOTHER (*holding a chopper*)

Shall he toast on a spit or be browned in a kettle?

THE TROLL KING

Quiet! Keep calm!

[Beckons to his counsellors to approach him]

We must not be too boastful

Things have been going badly with us lately,

We don't feel sure if we shall last or perish,

And can't afford to throw away assistance

Besides, the lad is almost without blemish,

And well-built too, as far as I can gather.

It's true enough that he has only *one* head,

But then my daughter hasn't more than one.

Three-headed Trolls are going out of fashion,

Two-headed, even, nowadays aren't common,

And *their* heads usually are not up to much*[To PEER GYNT]*

And so, my lad, it's my daughter you're after?

PEER GYNT

Yes, if she comes with a kingdom for dowry.

THE TROLL KING

You shall have half while I am living

And the other half when I am done for.

PEER GYNT.

I'm content with that

THE TROLL KING

But stop, young fellow,
You've got to give some pledges also
 Break one of them, and our bargain's off
 And you don't get out of here alive
 First, you must promise never to give thought to
 Aught except what within these hills is bounded,
 Shun the day, its deeds, and all the sunlit places.

PEER GYNT

If I'm called King, 'twill not be hard to do it

THE TROLL KING

Secondly—now I'll see how far you're clever——
[Rises from his seat.]

THE OLDEST TROLL COURTIER (*to* PEER GYNT)

Let's see if you've got a wisdom tooth
 That can crack the nut of our monarch's riddle!

THE TROLL KING

What is the difference between Trolls and Men?

PEER GYNT

There isn't any, as far as I can gather,
 Big trolls would roast and little ones would claw you—
 Just as with us if only we dared do it

THE TROLL KING

True, we're alike in that and other things too.
 Still, just as morning's different from evening,
 So there's a real difference between us,
 And I will tell you what it is Out yonder
 Under the skies, men have a common saying:

"Man, to thyself be true!" But here, 'mongst Trolls,
 "Troll, to thyself be—enough!" it runs

TROLL COURTIER (*to PEER GYNT*).

Well, do you fathom it?

PEER GYNT

It seems rather hazy.

THE TROLL KING

"Enough," my son—that word so fraught with
 meaning—
 Must be the motto written on your buckler.

PEER GYNT (*scratching his head*).

Well, but——

THE TROLL KING

It *must*, if you're to be a king here!

PEER GYNT

All right, so be it It is not much worse than——

THE TROLL KING

Next you must learn to value rightly
 Our simple, homely way of living
 [*He beckons, two TROLLS with pigs' heads, wearing*
 white nightcaps, bring food and drink
 Our cows give cakes and our oxen mead,
 No matter whether their taste is sour
 Or sweet, the great thing to remember
 Is that they're home-made and home-brewed.

PEER GYNT (*pushing the things away from him*)

The devil take your home-brewed drink!
 I'll never get used to your country's habits

THE TROLL KING

The bowl goes with it, and it is golden
Who takes the bowl gets my daughter too.

PEER GYNT (*thoughtfully*)

Of course we're told that a man should master
His disposition, and in the long run
Perhaps the drink will taste less sour
So, here goes!

[*Drinks.*]

THE TROLL KING

Now that was sensibly said.
But you spit?

PEER GYNT

I must trust to the force of habit.

THE TROLL KING

Next, you must take off all your Christian clothing,
For you must know we boast that in the Dovre
All's mountain-made, we've nothing from the valleys
Except the bows of silk that deck our tail-tips.

PEER GYNT (*angrily*).

I haven't got a tail!

THE TROLL KING

Then you shall have one.
[*To one of the courtiers*]
See that my Sunday tail is fastened on him

PEER GYNT

No, that he shan't! Do you want to make a fool of
me?

THE TROLL KING

Don't try with tail-less rump to court my daughter.

PEER GYNT.

Making a beast of a man!

THE TROLL KING

My son, you're wrong there,
I'd only make a courtly wooer of you
And, as a mark of very highest honour,
The bow you wear shall be of bright flame-colour

PEER GYNT (*reflectively*)

We're taught, of course, that man is but a shadow,
And one must pay some heed to use and wont, too.
So, tie away!

THE TROLL KING

You're coming to your senses

TROLL COURTIER

Just see how nicely you can wag and wave it!

PEER GYNT (*angrily*)

Now, do you mean to ask anything more of me?
Do you want me to give up my Christian faith?

THE TROLL KING

No, to keep that you are perfectly welcome
Faith is quite free, and pays no duty,
It's his dress and its cut that a Troll should be known
by.
If we're of one mind as to manners and costume
You're free to believe what would give us the horrors.

PEER GYNT

You are really, in spite of your many conditions,
More reasonable than one might have expected.

THE TROLL KING

We Trolls are better than our reputation,
 My son, and that is another difference
 Between you and us But now we have finished
 The serious part of the present assembly
 Our ears and our eyes shall now be delighted
 Let the harp-maid waken the Dovre-harp's strings,
 Let the dance-maiden tread the Dovre-hall's floor
 [*Music and a dance*]

What do you think of it?

PEER GYNT

Think of it? H'm——

THE TROLL KING

Tell me quite openly What did you see?

PEER GYNT

See? What I saw was impossibly ugly
 A bell-cow thrumming her hoof on a gut-string,
 A sow in short stockings pretending to dance to it.

THE TROLL COURTIER.

Eat him!

THE TROLL KING

Remember his understanding
 Is only human

TROLL MAIDENS

Oh, tear his eyes out
 And cut off his ears!

THE WOMAN IN GREEN (*weeping*).

Are we to endure it,
 My sister and I, when we've played and danced?

PEER GYNT

Oho, was it you? Well, you know, at a banquet
A joke is a joke—no offence was intended

THE WOMAN IN GREEN

Will you swear to me you were only joking?

PEER GYNT

The dance and the music were both delightful

THE TROLL KING

It's a funny thing, this human nature,
It clings to a man with such persistence.
Suppose we fight it and it is wounded,
There may be a scar, but it heals up quickly.
My son-in-law's now most accommodating,
He has willingly cast off his Christian breeches,
Willingly drunk of the mead-filled goblet,
Willingly tied on a tail behind him—
Is so willing, in fact, to do all we ask him
That I certainly thought the old Adam banished
For good and all, then, all of a sudden,
We find him uppermost Yes, my son,
You certainly must undergo some treatment
To cure this troublesome human nature.

PEER GYNT

What will you do?

THE TROLL KING

I'll scratch you slightly
In the left eye, and then your vision
Will be oblique, and all you look on
Will seem to you to be perfection
Then I'll cut out your right-hand window——

PEER GYNT

You're drunk!

THE TROLL KING

(laying some sharp instruments on the table)

See, here are the glazier's tools
You must be tamed like a raging bullock,
Then you'll perceive that your bride is lovely,
And never again will your sight deceive you
With dancing sows or bell-cows thrumming—

PEER GYNT.

That's fool's talk

THE OLDEST COURTIER

It's the Troll King's word,
He is the wise man and you the fool.

THE TROLL KING

Just think what a lot of trouble and worry
You will be rid of for good and all
Remember, too, that the eye is the source
Of the bitter, searing flood of tears

PEER GYNT

That's true, and it says in the family Bible:
" If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out "
But, tell me, when will my sight recover
And be as it is now?

THE TROLL KING

Never, my friend.

PEER GYNT

Oh, really! Then I must decline with thanks.

THE TROLL KING

But what do you mean to do?

PEER GYNT

To leave you

THE TROLL KING

Softly! It's easy to get within here,
But the Troll King's gate doesn't open outwards

PEER GYNT

You surely don't mean to detain me by force?

THE TROLL KING

Now listen, Prince Peer, and give way to reason!
You're cut out for a Troll Why, look, already
You bear yourself quite in a Troll-like fashion!
And you want to become one, don't you?

PEER GYNT

Of course

In return for a bride and a well-found kingdom
I'm not unwilling to sacrifice something,
But all things have their natural limit
I have taken a tail, it is true, but then
I can undo the knots that our friend has tied,
And take the thing off I have shed my breeches,
They were old and patched, but that won't prevent
me

From putting them on if I have a mind to.
I shall probably find it just as easy
To deal with your Trollish way of living.
I can easily swear that a cow's a maiden,
An oath's not a difficult thing to swallow.
But to know that one never can get one's freedom—
Not even to die as a human being—
To end one's days as a Troll of the mountains—
Never go back, as you tell me plainly—
That is a thing that I'll not submit to.

THE TROLL KING

Now, on my sins, I'm getting angry,
I'm not in the mood to be made a fool of
You scurvy lout! Do you know who I am?
To begin with, you make too free with my daughter—

PEER GYNT.

That's a lie in your throat!

THE TROLL KING

And you'll have to marry her.

PEER GYNT.

Do you dare accuse me of—?

THE TROLL KING

Can you deny

That she was the object of all your desire?

PEER GYNT (*whistles*)

But no more than that. What the deuce does that matter?

THE TROLL KING

You human beings are always the same
You are always ready to talk of your souls,
But heed nothing really save what is tangible
You think desires are things that don't matter?
Wait; your own eyes will prove to you shortly——

PEER GYNT

It's no use baiting your hook with lies!

THE TROLL KING

My Peer, ere the year's out you'll be a father.

PEER GYNT

Unlock the doors I'm going

THE TROLL KING.

We'll send you

The brat in a goat-skin

PEER GYNT (*wiping the sweat from his brow*).

I wish I could wake up!

THE TROLL KING.

Shall we send to your Palace?

PEER GYNT

Oh, send to the Parish!

THE TROLL KING

As you like, Prince Peer, it's your affair solely
But one thing is certain—what's done can't be undone,
And you will see how your offspring will grow up!
Mongrels like that grow remarkably quickly—

PEER GYNT

Oh, come, old chap, don't go at me like a bullock!
Fair maiden, be reasonable! Let's come to terms
I have to confess that I'm neither a prince
Nor rich, and, however you take my measure,
I'm sure you won't find you've made much of a
bargain

[*The WOMAN IN GREEN faints and is carried out
by the TROLL MAIDENS*]

THE TROLL KING

(*looks at him for a while with a contemptuous
expression, then says*)

Dash him to bits on the rocks, my good children!

YOUNG TROLLS

Dad, mayn't we first play at Owls and Eagles?
Or the Wolf-Game? Or Grey Mouse and Red-Eyed
Pussy?

THE TROLL KING

Yes, but be quick. I'm angry and sleepy.
Good night!

[*Goes*]

Peer Gynt

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PEER GYNT (*hunted by the YOUNG TROLLS*)

Let me go, you young devils!

[*Tries to climb up the chimney.*]

YOUNG TROLLS.

Hobgoblins!

Brownies! Come, bite him!

PEER GYNT.

Ow!

[*Tries to get away through the cellar-flap*]

YOUNG TROLLS

Stop all the holes up!

TROLL COURTIER

How the youngsters enjoy it!

PEER GYNT

(*fighting with a little TROLL who has bitten deep
into his ear*)

You filth, let go!

TROLL COURTIER

(*rapping PEER GYNT over the knuckles*)

A little respect for a king's son, you scoundrel!

PEER GYNT

Ah! A rat hole!

[*Runs towards it*]

YOUNG TROLLS

Stop up the holes, Brownie brothers!

PEER GYNT.

The old man was foul, but the young ones are worse!

YOUNG TROLLS

Flay him!

PEER GYNT.

I wish I were small as a mouse!

YOUNG TROLLS (*swarming about him*).

Don't let him escape!

PEER GYNT.

I wish I were a louse!

YOUNG TROLLS

Now jump on his face!

PEER GYNT (*smothered in TROLLS*)

Help, mother, I'm dying!

[*Church bells are heard afar off.*]

YOUNG TROLLS

Bells in the Valley! The Blackfrock's Cows!

[*The TROLLS disperse in a turmoil and wild shrieks The Hall falls to pieces Everything disappears*]

SCENE VII

(*Pitch darkness PEER GYNT is heard slashing and hitting about him with a branch of a tree*)

PEER GYNT.

Answer! Who are you?

A VOICE IN THE DARKNESS.

Myself!

PEER GYNT

Let me pass, then!

VOICE

Go round about, Peer! Room enough on the mountain.

[PEER GYNT *tries to pass another way, but runs up against something*

PEER GYNT

Who are you?

VOICE.

Myself Can you say as much?

PEER GYNT

I can say what I like, and my sword can strike!

Look out for yourself! I'm going to smash you!

King Saul slew hundreds, Peer Gynt slays thousands!

[*Hits about him wildly*

Who are you?

VOICE

Myself

PEER GYNT

That's a silly answer,

And you can keep it It tells me nothing

What are you?

VOICE

The great Boyg¹

PEER GYNT

No, are you really?

Things were black before, now some grey is showing

Out of my way, Boyg!

VOICE

Go round about, Peer!

¹ A monstrous invisible Troll whose legend occurs frequently in Scandinavian folklore

PEER GYNT.

No, through you! *[Hits out wildly]*
He's down!

[Tries to get on, but always runs up against some thing]

Ha, ha! Are there more of you?

VOICE

The Boyg, Peer Gynt! The one and only
The Boyg that's unwounded, the Boyg that was hurt.
The Boyg that was dead and the Boyg that's alive

PEER GYNT (*throwing away his branch*)

My weapon's bewitched, but I have my fists!
[Strikes out in front of him.]

VOICE

Yes, put your trust in your fists and strength!
Ho, ho! Peer Gynt, they'll bring you out top!

PEER GYNT

Backward or forward, it's just as far—
Out or in, the way's as narrow
It's there!—and there!—and all about me!
I think I've got out, and I'm back in the midst of it.
What's your name! Let me see you! Say what you
are!

VOICE

The Boyg

PEER GYNT (*feeling round him*).

Neither dead, nor alive, slime and mistiness,
No shape or form! It's as if one were smothered
Amidst any number of bears that are growling
At being waked up! *[Shrieks]*
Why don't you hit out at me!

VOICE

The Boyg's not so foolish as that.

PEER GYNT.

Oh, strike at me!

VOICE

The Boyg doesn't strike

PEER GYNT

Come, fight! You *shall* fight with me!

VOICE.

The great Boyg can triumph without any fighting

PEER GYNT

I'd far rather it were the Brownies tormenting me!

Or even as much as a one-year-old Troll!

Just something to fight with—and not this blank
nothingness!

It's snoring now! Boyg!

VOICE

What is it?

PEER GYNT

Show fight, will you!

VOICE

The great Boyg can get all he wishes by gentleness

PEER GYNT (*biting his own hands and arms*)

Oh, for claws and teeth that would tear my flesh!

I must see a drop of my own blood flow!

[*A sound is heard like the beating of wings of great
birds*]

BIRDS' CRIES

Is he coming, Boyg?

VOICE

Yes, foot by foot.

BIRDS' CRIES

Sisters afar off, fly to meet us!

PEER GYNT

If you mean to save me, girl, be quick!
 Don't hang your head and look down blushing
 Your prayer-book! Hit him straight in the eye with
 it!

BIRDS' CRIES.

He's failing!

VOICE

He's ours

BIRDS' CRIES

Come, sisters, quickly!

PEER GYNT

An hour of torture such as this
 Is too dear a price to pay for life. [Sinks down

BIRDS' CRIES

Boyg, he is down! Boyg, seize him! Seize him!
*[Church bells and the singing of psalms are heard
 in the distance]*

VOICE

*(with a gasp, as the BOYG gradually dwindles away
 to nothing)*

He was too strong There were women behind him.

SCENE VIII

(SCENE — *On the hillside outside a hut on AASE'S mountain pasture It is sunrise. The door of the hut is barred Everything is empty and still PEER GYNT lies asleep by the hut Presently he wakes and looks around him with listless and heavy eyes*)

PEER GYNT (*spitting*)

I'd give the world for a pickled herring!

[*He spits again, then he sees HELGA approaching, carrying a basket of food*

You here, youngster? What do you want?

HELGA

It was Solveig——

PEER GYNT (*springing up*).

Where is she?

HELGA

Behind the hut

SOLVEIG (*from behind the hut*)

If you come any nearer, I'll run away!

PEER GYNT (*standing still*)

Perhaps you're afraid I shall carry you off?

SOLVEIG

For shame!

PEER GYNT

Do you know where I was last night?
The Troll King's daughter is hunting me down.

SOLVEIG

'Twas well done, then, that we rang the bells.

PEER GYNT

Oh, Peer Gynt's not quite the lad to get caught—
What's that you say?

HELGA (*crying*)

She's running away

[*Runs after SOLVEIG*]

Wait for me!

PEER GYNT (*gripping her by the arm*)

See what I've got in my pocket!

A fine silver button! And you shall have it
If you speak up for me!

HELGA

Oh, let me go!

PEER GYNT

Take it, then.

HELGA

Oh, let me go!—and my basket!

PEER GYNT

You had better look out if you don't—!

HELGA

Oh, you frighten me!

PEER GYNT (*quietly, as he lets her go*)

No, all I meant was don't let her forget me!

[*HELGA runs off*]

ACT III

SCENE I

(SCENE —*The depths of a pine-wood It is a grey autumn day, and snow is falling* PEER GYNT *is in his shirt-sleeves, felling timber He has just tackled a tall tree with crooked branches*)

PEER GYNT

Oh yes, you're tough, my ancient friend,
But that won't help you, you're coming down!
[*Sets to work again*]

I know you're wearing a coat of mail,
But I'll slash through, were it never so strong.
Yes, you may shake your crooked arms,
I daresay you're both fierce and angry,
But all the same you shall bow to me—!

[*Suddenly breaks off sullenly*]

What lies! It's only an ancient tree
What lies! I'm fighting no mail-clad foe,
It's only a fir with its bark all cracked.
It's toilsome work, this felling timber,
But the devil's own job when all the time
One's dreams get mixed up with one's working
All that must stop—this daytime dreaming
And always being in the clouds
My lad, remember that you're an outlaw!
Your only shelter's in this forest

[*Works again hurriedly for a while.*]

An outlaw, yes You have no mother
To bring you food and spread your table
If you want to eat, you must help yourself,
Get what you can from the woods and the stream,
Forage for sticks if you want a fire,

Look to yourself for everything
 If you need clothes, you must skin a deer,
 If you want a wall to put round your house,
 You must break the stones, if you want to build,
 You must fell the timber and shoulder it
 And carry it to the spot you've chosen

[He lets his axe fall and stares in front of him]

I'll build a beauty! Up on the roof
 I'll have a tower and weather-vane,
 And on the gable-end I'll carve
 A lovely mermaid Vane and locks
 Shall be of brass, and window panes
 Shall shine so bright that from afar
 People shall wonder what it is
 That they see gleaming in the sun

[Laughs bitterly]

Damned lies! Why, there I go again!
 Remember that you're an outlaw, boy!

[Sets to work feverishly]

A well-thatched hut is quite enough
 To keep out both the frost and rain

[Looks up at the tree]

It's giving way One more stroke! There!
 He's down and fallen all his length,
 And all the undergrowth is quivering

*[Sets to work to lop off the branches, all at once
 he stops and listens, with uplifted axe]*

There's someone coming! Ingrid's father—
 Trying to catch me treacherously!

[Hides behind a tree and peeps out]

A boy! Just one And he looks frightened.
 He's glancing round him What is that
 He's hiding underneath his jacket?
 A sickle Now he stands and looks—
 He lays his hand upon a log—

What now? Why does he brace himself—?

Ugh! He has chopped a finger off!

And now he's bleeding like a pig—

And now he runs off with his hand

Wrapped in a clout

[Comes forward]

He must be mad!
Chopped it right off!—a precious finger!
And did it, too, as if he meant it
Oho, I see! If one's not anxious
To serve His Gracious Majesty
That is the only way So that's it!
They would have called him for the army,
But he, I see, would be exempted
Still, to cut off—? To lose for ever—?
The thought, perhaps—the wish—the will—
Those I could understand, but really
To *do* the deed! Ah, no—that beats me!
[*Shakes his head a little, then resumes his work*]

SCENE II

(SCENE —*A room in AASE's house Everything is in disorder The clothes-chest is standing open, clothes lie scattered about, a cat is lying on the bed AASE and KARI are trying to put things in order*)

AASE (*running to one side of the room*)

Kari, tell me——

KARI

What is it?

AASE.

Tell me——

Where is—? Where shall I find—? Oh, tell me,
Where is—? What am I looking for?
I'm going crazy! Where's the chest key?

KARI

It's in the keyhole

AASE

What's that rumbling?

KARI.

The last load going off to Hægstad ¹AASE (*weeping*)

I wish they were taking me in my coffin!
What we poor creatures have to suffer!
God pity me! The whole house emptied!
What Hægstad left, the Judge has taken
They've scarcely left me with a rag
To put upon my back It's shameful
To have pronounced so hard a sentence!

[Sits down on the edge of the bed]

The farm's gone now, and all our land
He's a hard man, but the Law was harder,
No one to help me—none showed mercy—
Peer gone, and no one to advise me

KARI

You've got this house until you die.

AASE

Oh, yes—the bread of charity,
For me and for my cat!

KARI

Old mother,

God help you! Peer has cost you dear.

AASE

My Peer? I think you've lost your senses!
They got their Ingrid, safe and sound
They should have rightly blamed the Devil,
He is the culprit, and no other,
'Twas he, the ugly beast, that tempted
My poor dear boy!

¹ As sentence for his crime of the rape of Ingrid, Peer Gynt has been proclaimed an outlaw and the forest his only sanctuary. All his possessions have become forfeit to Ingrid's father and to the law.

KARI

Had you not better
Send for the priest? For all you know,
Things may be worse than you believe.

AASE

Send for the priest? Perhaps I'd better [Gets up]
No, no—I cannot! I'm his mother,
I must help the boy—it's only my duty,
I must do my best, when everyone fails me
They've left him that coat. I must get it patched.
I wish I had dared to keep the bed-cover!
Where are the stockings?

KARI

There, with that rubbish.

AASE (*fumbling among the things*)

What's this? Look here! An old casting-ladle!
He used to pretend to mould buttons with this,
Melt them and shape them and stamp them too.
Once, when we'd company, in came the boy
And begged of his father a bit of tin
"Not tin," said John, "King Christian's coin!
A silver coin to melt, and show
That you're the son of rich John Gynt"
May God forgive him, for he was drunk,
And when he was drunk it was all the same,
Tin or gold Ah, here are the stockings!
They are all in holes, I must darn them, Kari.

KARI

They certainly need it

AASE.

When that is done,
I must go to bed. I feel so bad,

So wretchedly ill. [Joyfully
 Oh, look here, Kari!
 Two flannel shirts that they have forgotten!

KARI.

Aye, so they have

AASE

That's a lucky find.
 You might put one of them aside
 Or—no, I think we'll take them both,
 The one he has on is so thin and worn

KARI

But, Aase, you know that it's a sin!

AASE

Oh, yes, but you know the parson tells us
 That all our sins may be forgiven

SCENE III

(SCENE —*Outside a newly built hut in the forest
 Reindeer horns over the door Deep snow everywhere.
 It is nightfall* PEER GYNT is standing fixing a heavy
 wooden bolt to the door)

PEER GYNT (*laughing now and then*)

There must be a bolt, to fasten my door
 Against the Troll-folk and men and women.
 There must be a bolt, to keep me safe
 From all the plaguy crowd of goblins
 They'll come when it's dark, and I'll hear them
 knocking
 "Open, Peer, we are quick as thoughts!
 Under the bed, on the hearth in the ashes,
 You'll hear us creeping and crawling about,

We'll fly down the chimney like fiery dragons
Hee-hee! Do you think your nails and planks
Can save you from plaguy goblin-thoughts? "

[SOLVEIG comes over the snow on ski, she has a
shawl over her head and a bundle in her hand

SOLVEIG

God bless your work You must not reject me
I had your message, and you must take me.

PEER GYNT

Solveig! It can't be—! Yes, it is!
And not afraid to come so near me!

SOLVEIG

I had your message from little Helga,
And others I had from the winds and the silence
There was one in all that your mother told me,
And others that came to me in my dreams
The dreary nights and the empty days
Brought me the message that I must come
All light had gone from my life down yonder,
I had neither the heart to laugh nor to weep
I could not tell what was in your mind,
I could only tell what I needs must do.

PEER GYNT.

But your father?

SOLVEIG

I've no one on God's wide earth
That I can call father or mother now;
I've left them for ever

PEER GYNT

Solveig, my dear—

To come to me?

SOLVEIG

Yes, to you alone,
You must be all to me—friend and comfort
[*In tears*
The worst was leaving my little sister,
And worse than that, to leave my father,
And worst of all to leave her who carried me
At her breast, no, God forgive me,
The worst indeed was the bitter sorrow
That I must part from all my dear ones!

PEER GYNT

And do you know the heavy sentence
The law pronounced? They've taken from me
Everything that I had or might have

SOLVEIG

'Twas not for what you had or might have
I gave up what was dearest to me.

PEER GYNT

And do you know that if I venture
Beyond this forest I am forfeit
If any man can lay hand on me?

SOLVEIG

When I asked my way as I came hither,
They questioned me—where was I going?
“I'm going home”—that was my answer.

PEER GYNT

Ah, then I need no bolts to guard me,
No locks against the powers of evil!
My hunter's hut is consecrated
If you deign enter it and live there.
Dear, let me look at you! Not too near you—
I'd only look at you! How lovely,
How pure you are! Let my arms lift you!

How slim and light you are, my Solveig!
I'd carry you for ever, dearest,
And never weary! I'll not soil you,
I'll hold your warm and lovely body
At arms' length from me! Ah, my Solveig,
Can I believe I've made you love me?
Both night and day 'tis what I've longed for.
See, I have built this little dwelling—
It shall come down, it's cramped and ugly—

SOLVEIG

Little or big, I'm happy here
Here one can breathe, in the buffeting wind
Down yonder 'twas sultry, I felt hemmed in;
It was partly that, that drove me away
But here, where one hears the fir trees sighing—
Such song and silence!—I feel at home

PEER GYNT

But, dear, are you sure? It means for ever!

SOLVEIG

There's no way back on the road I have trodden

PEER GYNT

You're mine, then! Go in! I would see you within!
Go in! I will fetch some wood for a fire,
To warm you snugly and flicker brightly,
You shall sit soft and never shiver

[He unbars the door, and SOLVEIG goes in. He stands silent for a moment, then laughs aloud for joy and leaps into the air.]

My princess! Now she is found and won!
Now my palace shall spring into being!

[Seizes his axe and crosses over towards the trees. At the same moment an elderly woman in a tattered green gown advances out of the wood, an ugly child with a flagon in his hand limps after her, holding on to her skirt.]

THE WOMAN.

Good evening, Peer Light-Foot!

PEER GYNT

What is it? Who are you?

THE WOMAN

Old friends, Peer Gynt! My hut is quite near here
We're neighbours

PEER GYNT

Indeed? I was not aware of it.

THE WOMAN

As your hut grew up, so mine grew beside it.

PEER GYNT (*trying to get away*)

I'm in a great hurry.

THE WOMAN

You always were that,
But, trudging along, in the end I come up with you

PEER GYNT.

Old dame, you're mistaken!

THE WOMAN

I know I was once,
That day when you made me such wonderful promises

PEER GYNT

I made you promises? Why, what the devil—?

THE WOMAN

Do you mean you've forgotten the night when you
drank
At my father's? Do you mean you've forgotten——

PEER GYNT.

I mean
I've forgotten what never took place to remember!
What nonsense is this? And when last did we meet?

THE WOMAN.

The last time we met was the first time we met
[To the child]
Give your father a drink, I think he is thirsty

PEER GYNT

His father? You're drunk! Do you mean that this
urchin—?

THE WOMAN

You're not going to say that you can't recognise him?
Have you eyes? Can't you see that he's lame in the
shanks
As you're lame in your mind?

PEER GYNT

Do you mean to pretend that—?

THE WOMAN.

You can't wriggle out of it!

PEER GYNT.

That long-legged brat—?

THE WOMAN.

He has grown very fast

PEER GYNT.

Why, you ugly old hag,
Do you dare to assert that this—?

THE WOMAN

Listen, Peer Gynt;
 You're as coarse as a bullock [Weeps.
 Oh, how can I help it
 If I'm not as fair as I was when you tempted me
 Out on the hill-side up there in the mountains?
 And when in the autumn my travail came on me,
 I'd only the Devil to act as a midwife,
 So it isn't surprising I lost all my beauty
 But if you would see me as fair as before,
 You've only to turn out that girl that's in there,
 Out of your house and your mind and your sight,
 Do that, dearest lad, and my ill-looks will vanish!

PEER GYNT.

Get away, you old witch!

THE WOMAN

You shall see if I will!

PEER GYNT

I'll break your head for you!

THE WOMAN

Try, if you dare!
 You'll find me, Peer, a hard nut to crack!
 Every day I shall be back again,
 Peeping at doors and spying on both of you
 When you and your girl are sitting together,
 And you are inclined for cuddling and fondling,
 You'll find me beside you, claiming my share of it
 She and I will share you—turn about
 Good-bye, dear boy If you like the prospect,
 Then wed her to-morrow!

PEER GYNT

You devil's nightmare!

THE WOMAN

But I had forgotten! You've got to look after
Your little son—this graceful urchin!
Come on, little imp, will you go to your father?

THE BOY (*spitting at PEER*)

If I had an axe, I'd split you in two with it!
Just wait!

THE WOMAN (*kissing the BOY*)

What a head he's got on his shoulders!
When you've grown up you'll be just like your father!

PEER GYNT (*stamping his foot*).

I wish you——

THE WOMAN.

As far off as now we are near you?

PEER GYNT (*clenching his fists*)

And all this comes——

THE WOMAN

Just of thoughts and desires!
Hard luck for you, Peer!

PEER GYNT

It's hardest for her—
For Solveig—my lovehest, purest treasure!

THE WOMAN

Oh, yes, the innocent always suffer—
As the Devil said when his mother thrashed him
Because his father had come home drunk!

[*She moves off into the wood with the BOY, who
throws the flagon behind him*

PEER GYNT (*after a long silence*).

"Round about," said the Boyg, that's how I must
go —

My palace has trembled about my ears!
She was so near me, and now there has risen
A wall between us, and all in a moment
My joy is gone and everything's ugly
"Round about"—ah, yes, there's no straight road
That leads through this from me to her
No straight road? All the same, there might be.
If I remember aright, the Bible
Says something somewhere about repentance—
But I've no Bible, and I've forgotten
The most of it, and in this forest
There's not a thing that will give me guidance.
Repent? It might take years to do it
Before I found the way And, meanwhile,
A life that's empty, ugly, dreary,
And in the end from shreds and fragments
To try and patch the thing together?
One can patch up a broken fiddle,
But not a watch-spring If one tramples
On growing things they're spoiled for ever.—
But, surely, the old witch was lying!
I can put all those ugly doings
Out of my sight! But—can I put them
Out of my mind? I shall be haunted
By lurking memories—of Ingrid—
Of those three girls upon the hillside.
Will they come too, and jeer and threaten,
And beg of me to hold them closely
Or lift them tenderly at arms' length?
It's no use! Were my arms as long
As fir-trees' stems or pine-trees' branches,
I should be holding *her* too near
To set her down again unsullied.
I must find some way round about,
Without a thought of gain or loss,
Some way to free me from such thoughts

And shut them from my mind for ever.

[Takes a few steps towards the hut, then stops.]

But—go in now? Disgraced and soiled?

With all these Troll-folk at my heels?

Speak, and yet not tell all? Confess,

And still be hiding something from her?

[Throws away his axe]

No, no—to go and meet her now,

Such as I am, were sacrilege

[SOLVEIG appears at the door of the hut]

SOLVEIG.

Are you coming, dear?

PEER GYNT *(below his breath)*

“Go round about”!

SOLVEIG.

What do you say?

PEER GYNT

Dear, you must wait.

It's dark, and I've a heavy load.

SOLVEIG

I'll come and help you bear the load.

PEER GYNT

No, do not come! Stay where you are!

I'll bear the whole of it

SOLVEIG

But, dear,

Don't be too long

PEER GYNT

Be patient, child;

Whether the time is long or short,

You must just wait.

SOLVEIG (*nodding to him*)

Yes, I will wait

[PEER GYNT goes off along the forest path SOLVEIG remains standing at the half-open door]

SCENE IV

(SCENE —AASE's house It is evening A log fire is burning on the hearth and lights up the room A cat is lying on a chair at the foot of a bed on which AASE is lying, fumbling restlessly with the sheets)

AASE

Ah me, is my son never coming?
The nights are so weary and long
I've no one to take him a message,
And so much to say to him now,
My time's running short—oh, how quickly!
To think that the end should be this!
If only I'd known, I would never
Have said a hard word to the boy!
[PEER GYNT comes in]

PEER GYNT.

Good evening!

AASE

My boy! Oh, God bless you!
My dearest, at last you have come!
But how have you dared to come hither?
Your life is in danger, you know

PEER GYNT

My life?—oh, my life doesn't matter
I had to come down to you now

AASE

And Kar!—she said that you wouldn't!
Ah, now I can leave you in peace

PEER GYNT

Leave me? Why, what are you saying?
And where do you think you can go?

AASE

Ah, Peer, it's the end that's approaching;
I haven't much longer to live

PEER GYNT

(turning away abruptly and walking across the room)

I was running away from my sorrows,
And thought at least here I'd be free—!
Are you cold? Are your hands and your feet cold?

AASE

Yes, Peer, you'll be done with me soon
When my eyes lose their light you must close them—
But tenderly, carefully, Peer
And then you must get me a coffin,
And see that it's handsome and fine.
Ah no, I forgot——

PEER GYNT.

Do be quiet!
Time enough for all that by-and-by.

AASE

Yes, yes. *[Looks uneasily round the room]*
Do you see what a little
They've left me? It's all one to them

PEER GYNT (*with a grimace*).

There you go! [*Harshly.*]
 Yes, I know I am guilty.
 But what do you think is the good
 Of raking it up to remind me?

AASE

No! It was the drink was to blame.
 That damnable drink that destroyed you,
 My boy, for you know you were drunk,
 And didn't know what you were doing.
 Besides—that wild ride on the buck!—
 I'm sure it was not to be wondered
 If you were not right in your head.

PEER GYNT

Never mind all that nonsense and rubbish;
 Never mind about anything now
 Let's put off serious thinking
 Till later—another day
[*Sits down on the edge of the bed.*]
 Now, mother, let's have a gossip,
 And talk of all sorts of things,
 Except what's ugly and horrid
 And hurts—let's forget all that.
 Bless me! Why, there's old pussy!
 To think that he's still alive!

AASE

At night he seems so uneasy;
 And we all know what that means!

PEER GYNT (*turning away*).

What is the news in the district?

AASE (*smiling*).

They do say that hereabouts
 There's a girl that longs for the mountains——

PEER GYNT (*hastily*).

Mads Moen—is he content?

AASE

They say that she will not listen
To the old folks' prayers and tears.
You ought to go and see her,
Maybe you could find a way——

PEER GYNT

And what's become of the blacksmith?

AASE

Oh, bother the dirty smith!
I'd so much rather tell you
Her name—that girl's, you know——

PEER GYNT

No, we're going to have a gossip,
And talk of all sorts of things,
Except what's ugly and horrid
And hurts—let's forget all that
Shall I fetch you a drink? Are you thirsty?
Can you stretch in that little bed?
Let me look—why, this is surely
The bed I had as a boy!
Do you remember your sitting
Beside my bed at night
Smoothing the bed-spread over
And singing me rhymes and songs?

AASE

Yes, and we played at sleighing,
When your father had gone away—
The bed-spread was our apron,
And the floor an ice-bound fjord

PEER GYNT

Yes, but do you remember
The finest bit of it all—
Our pair of prancing horses?

AASE

Why, yes—of course I do
'Twas Kar's cat we borrowed,
And put up on a stool

PEER GYNT

To Soria-Moria ¹ Castle,
That's westward of the moon
And eastward of the sunrise,
O'er hill and dale we flew.
A stick that we found in the cupboard
Made you a splendid whip

AASE

I sat up like the driver——

PEER GYNT

Yes, and you shook the reins,
And turned round as we galloped,
To ask if I were cold
God bless you, you old scolder!
You were a dear to me——
Why do you groan?

AASE

It's my back, Peer,
It's sore from lying here

PEER GYNT

Stretch up and I'll support you
There—now you're lying snug

¹ The name is taken from the Arabic name of a group of islands beyond the Red Sea which were fabled to be the Isles of the Blest

AASE (*uneasily*).

I want to get away, Peer.

PEER GYNT.

To get away?

AASE.

Ah, yes—

It's what I'm always longing.

PEER GYNT

What senseless talk is that?

See, let me smooth the bed-clothes

And then sit on the bed,—

Now, we will make the time fly

With singing rhymes and songs.

AASE

No, let me have my prayer-book;

My mind is ill at ease

PEER GYNT.

In Soria-Moria Castle

They're having a splendid feast.

Rest back upon the cushions,

I'll drive you quickly there—

AASE

But, dear, am I invited?

PEER GYNT

Of course—and I am, too

[*He throws a cord round the back of the chair on which the cat is lying, takes a stick in his hand and sits down on the foot of the bed*

Gee up! Get on with you, Blackie!

Mother, you're sure you're not cold?

Peer Gynt

Aha! Now we shall be moving,
When Grane kicks up his heels!

AASE

But, Peer—I hear something ringing——

PEER GYNT

It's the glittering sleigh-bells, dear.

AASE

They sound so strange and hollow!

PEER GYNT

We're driving over a fjord.

AASE

I'm frightened! What is it that's sighing
And moaning so wild and drear?

PEER GYNT

It's only the firs on the hillside
Whispering Just sit still

AASE.

I seem to see lights in the distance.
What is it that's glistening there?

PEER GYNT

It's the windows and gates of the Castle.
Can you hear the dancers?

AASE

Yes.

PEER GYNT

And outside stands Saint Peter
Asking you to come in

AASE.

Does he greet me?

PEER GYNT.

Yes, with honour,
And offers you sweetest wine.

AASE

Wine! Does he offer cakes, too?

PEER GYNT

A plateful of them, yes!
And our parson's wife preparing
Your coffee and your dessert.

AASE

What! Shall I really meet her?

PEER GYNT.

As soon and as oft as you please.

AASE

You're driving your poor old mother
To a splendid party, Peer!

PEER GYNT (*smacking his whip*)
Gee up! Get on with you, Blackie!

AASE

Are you sure that you know the way?

PEER GYNT (*smacking his whip again*).
I can see the road.

AASE.

But the journey
Makes me feel ill and tired.

Peer Gynt

PEER GYNT

I can see the Castle before me;
The drive will soon be done

AASE

I'll lie back with my eyes shut,
And trust to you, my boy!

PEER GYNT

Now show your paces, Grane!
The Castle is all agog,
The folk all swarm to the gateway,
Peer Gynt and his mother arrive!
Why, what's that, Mister Saint Peter?
You won't let my mother in?
You must look far, I can tell you,
To find a worthier soul
Of myself I will say nothing,
I can turn back to the gate
I'll take pot-luck, if you'll have me,
If not, it's all one to me
Like the Devil in the pulpit,
I've told a heap of lies,
And have called my dear old mother
A silly old hen, I know,
Because she cackled and scolded,
But things must be different here.
You must respect and revere her,
Sincerely and honestly,
You'll not get anyone better
From our parts nowadays.—
Oho! Here's God the Father!
Saint Peter, you'll catch it now!

[*Speaks in a deep voice*

"Just stop that bullying, will you!
Mother Aase is welcome here!"

[*Laughs aloud and turns to his mother*

I knew how 'twould be! Saint Peter
Is singing small enough now!

[His voice takes on an anxious tone]

Why do you stare so, mother?
Have you lost your senses, dear?

[Goes to the head of the bed]

You mustn't lie and stare so—!
Speak, mother, it's I, your boy!

*[Feels her forehead and hands cautiously, then
throws the cord away on to the chair and says
in a low voice]*

So it's that!—You may rest now, Grane,
Our journey's over and done

[Shuts her eyes and bends over her]

Thanks, dear, for all you gave me,
Thrashings and kisses alike!

And now it's for you to thank me—

[Presses his cheek against her lips]

There—that was the driver's fee

[KARI comes in]

KARI

What? Peer! Then her deepest sorrow
And grieving will be forgot!
Good Lord, how sound she is sleeping!
Or is she—?

PEER GYNT

Hush, she is dead

*[KARI weeps by AASE's body PEER GYNT walks
to and fro in the room, at last he stops by
the bedside]*

PEER GYNT

See that she's decently buried.
I must try to escape from here.

KARI

Where shall you go?

PEER GYNT.

To the sea-coast.

KARI

So far!

PEER GYNT

Aye, and farther still.

[*Goes out.*]

ACT IV

SCENE I

(SCENE — *A grove of palm trees, on the south-west coast of Morocco. A dining-table is spread under an awning, rush matting underfoot. Farther back in the grove hammocks are hanging. A steam yacht, flying the Norwegian and American flags, is lying off the shore. A jolly-boat is drawn up on the beach. It is nearly sundown. PEER GYNT, now a good-looking middle-aged man, dressed in a neat travelling-suit, with a pair of gold-mounted eyeglasses dangling on his breast, is presiding at table as host to MR COTTON, MONSIEUR BALLON, HERR VON EBERKOPF and HERR TRUMPETERSTRAALE. The party have just finished a meal. PEER GYNT is passing the wine.*)

PEER GYNT

Drink, gentlemen! If man is meant
For pleasure, let him take his pleasure
The past's the past—what's done is done—
So we are taught. What may I give you?

HERR TRUMPETERSTRAALE

As host, dear brother Gynt, you're splendid!

PEER GYNT.

The credit's just as much my purse's,
My cook's and steward's——

MR COTTON

Very well,
Then here's a health to all the four!

MONSIEUR BALLON

Monsieur, your taste—your *ton*—is such
 As nowadays one seldom meets with
 Amongst men living *en garçon*—
 A certain *je ne sais quoi*—

HERR VON EBERKOPF

Quite so;

A breath, a gleam, of introspection—
 World-citizenship's inspiration,
 A glance that pierces clouds, that's free
 From any narrow prejudices,
 A glimpse of higher criticism,
 A simple nature coupled with
 A life's experience and thereby
 Uplifted to the highest power
 I think that's what you meant—eh, Monsieur?

MONSIEUR BALLON

Yes, very possibly In French
 It doesn't sound quite so impressive.

HERR VON EBERKOPF

Of course not French is somewhat cramped.
 But if we want to trace the source
 Of this phenomenon—

PEER GYNT

That's easy;

It's just because I've never married
 Why, gentlemen, the thing's as clear
 As daylight What's a man's first duty?
 The answer's brief To be himself—
 To take good care of all that touches
 Himself and what is his But how
 Can he do this if his existence
 Is that of a pack-camel laden
 With someone else's weal and woe?

HERR VON EBERKOPF

But I dare say you've had to fight
For this self-centred concentration?

PEER GYNT

Oh yes, I've had to fight for it,
But I have always won the honours,
Though once I very nearly fell
Into a trap, for all my cunning
I was a wild, good-looking spark,
And let my roving fancy capture
A girl who was of royal blood——

MONSIEUR BALLON

Of royal blood?

PEER GYNT (*carelessly*)

Or very nearly.

You know——

HERR TRUMPETERSTRAALE (*thumping on the table*)

These damned aristocrats!

PEER GYNT (*shrugging his shoulders*)

These bogus Highnesses, whose pride
Is to keep off from their escutcheon
The slightest speck of what's plebeian.

MR COTTON

And so it came to nothing, then?

MONSIEUR BALLON

The family opposed the match?

PEER GYNT

Quite the reverse!

MONSIEUR BALLON.

Ah!

PEER GYNT (*discreetly*)

Well, you see,
Things took a turn which made them think
That it was high time we were married
But, to be candid, the affair
From first to last was most distasteful.
In certain things I'm very dainty,
And also like my independence,
And when her father came and hinted
That he would make it a condition
That I should change my name and status
And lose my own nobility—
With lots of similar conditions
I could not stomach or accept—
I gracefully retired from it,
Refused the father's ultimatum,
And gave my youthful bride her *congé*
[*Drums on the table with his fingers, and says*
with a pious air
Ah yes, there is a Hand that guides us,
And we poor men can trust to that.
It's very comforting to know it

MONSIEUR BALLON.

So the affair went by the board?

PEER GYNT

No, it took on another aspect.
Outsiders meddled in the game
And raised an unexpected pother.
The youngsters of the family
Were much the worst I had to battle
With seven of them all at once
I never shall forget that time,
Though I emerged from it the victor.

Some blood was spilt, but still that blood
Sealed my certificate of valour,
And proved what I remarked just now—
That there's a Hand that guides us wisely.

HERR VON EBERKOPF.

You have an outlook upon life
That proves you a philosopher.
For, while an ordinary thinker
Sees every detail separately
And never grasps the whole completely,
Your vision covers all together
You have a universal standard
To measure life with Your perceptions,
Like rays of sunlight, emanating
From a great central contemplation,
Pierce every fallacy —And yet
You say you had no education ?

PEER GYNT

I am, as I've already told you,
A self-taught man in every way.
I've never learnt methodically,
But I have thought and speculated
And read a bit on every subject
I was not young when I began,
And so, of course, it wasn't easy
To plough the field of knowledge up
And do the thing at all completely
I've learnt my history in scraps,
For more than that I've had no leisure.
And since, when evil days assail,
A man needs certain things to trust in,
I fitfully absorbed religion,
I found that it assimilated
Much easier if taken that way
No use to glut one's self with reading,
But to select what may be useful——

Peer Gynt

MR COTTON.

Ah, now, that's practical!

PEER GYNT

Dear friends,
Just think what my career has been
What was I when I first went westwards?
Quite penniless and empty-handed
I had to work hard for my food—
No easy job, believe me, often,
But life, my friends, is always sweet,
And death, as we all know, is bitter
Well! Luck, you see, did not desert me,
And good old Fate was always kindly
Things moved, and I was always careful,
And so things went from good to better,
And, ten years after that, they called me
The Cræsus of the Charlestown traders,
My name was known in every port
And luck pursued me with my shipping——

MR COTTON

What was your trade?

PEER GYNT

I trafficked most
In negro slaves for Carolina
And idols that were sent to China.

MONSIEUR BALLON.

Oh, fie, for shame!

HERR TRUMPETERSTRAALE

Friend Gynt, how could you?

PEER GYNT

You think my enterprise was passing
Beyond the bounds of what was lawful?

I felt the same thing very keenly,
 I found it hateful in the end
 But, once begun, you may believe me
 'Twas difficult enough to end it
 In any case, so big a business
 Affected others by the thousand,
 To break it off too suddenly
 Would have, of course, been most disastrous
 I never like to break things off,
 But all the same, I must admit
 I've always fully been alive
 To what you'd call the consequences,
 And, when I've overstepped the bounds,
 It's always made me feel uneasy
 Besides, I wasn't growing younger
 By that time I was nearly fifty,
 And by degrees my hair was greying,
 And, though my health was always perfect,
 Thoughts such as this cropped up to plague me:
 "Who knows how short the time may be
 Before the Great Assize is summoned
 And sheep from goats are separated?"
 What could I do? To cease my trade
 With China was impossible
 I found a way I opened up
 A second traffic to those waters,
 And, though each spring I sent to China
 Shiploads of idols, every autumn
 I sent out Missionaries furnished
 With everything that could be needful
 To work conversion—stockings, rum,
 Bibles and rice——

MR COTTON

All at a profit?

PEER GYNT

Oh, well, of course.—The plan worked well.
 For every idol sold out yonder

There was a duly baptized coolie,
So one thing neutralized the other.
We kept the Missionaries busy,
Because they had to counteract
The idols that we were exporting.

MR COTTON

But what about the negro traffic?

PEER GYNT

Why, there my morals triumphed also.
I felt the trade was scarcely suited
To one whose years were fast increasing,
You never know when death may claim you
And then there were the thousand pitfalls
Dug by our philanthropic friends,
Besides the chance of being caught
And daily risks from wind and weather
By taking thought I found a way
"You'll have to reef your sails, friend Peter,
And see"—so I said to myself—
"How you can best retrieve your error!"
I bought land in a southern state,
And held back my last load of niggers
(Which was of first-class quality)
And settled them on the plantation
They thrived apace, grew fat and sleek,
And they, as well as I, were happy.
Yes, without bragging I may say
I treated them like any father—
And the result was handsome profit.
I built them schools, so as to set
A standard of morality
To be maintained, and saw to it
That it was kept well up to mark
And then, to make the change complete,
Out of the business I retired,
And sold, with livestock, as it stood,
The whole plantation When I left,

To all alike, both young and old,
A gratis gift of grog was issued,
And every nigger got a skinful
The widows, as an extra gift,
Were given snuff. And so I hope—
Unless the Word is merely froth
Which says one's deeds are surely good
If they are not as surely evil—
That all my errors are forgot,
And that perhaps in greater measure
Than in most people's case, my deeds
Will more than balance out my sins

HERR VON EBERKOPF (*clinking glasses with him*).

How edifying 'tis to hear
A scheme of life worked out so deftly,
Freed from the fog of theories
And undisturbed by outer clamour!

PEER GYNT

(*who during the foregoing conversation has been
applying steadily to the bottle*)

We northern men are famous hands
At planning a campaign! The secret
Of life's success is very simple—
Merely to keep one's ears shut tight
To the insidious advances
Of a pernicious reptile.

MR COTTON.

Aye,
But what's the reptile, my dear friend?

PEER GYNT

A small one, always tempting men
To take irrevocable steps [*Drinks again.*]
A man can venture without fear,
And keep his courage, if he's careful
Not to get definitely caught
In any of life's cunning pitfalls—

If he looks forward, and beyond
 The present moment and its chances,
 And always carefully preserves
 A bridge behind him to retire on
 That theory has held me up
 And always coloured all my conduct—
 A theory I inherited
 And learnt at home from early childhood.

MONSIEUR BALLON

You're a Norwegian, I believe?

PEER GYNT

By birth, yes, but by disposition
 I am a citizen of the world
 For the good fortune I've enjoyed,
 I have to thank America,
 My well-stocked library I owe
 To Germany's advanced young thinkers,
 From France I get my taste in dress,
 My manners, and whatever turn
 I have for subtleness of mind,
 England has taught me industry
 And care for my own interests,
 The Jews have taught me how to wait,
 From Italy I've caught a dash
 Of taste for *dolce far niente*,
 And once, when in a sorry fix,
 I reached the goal of my desire
 By trusting to good Swedish steel

HERR TRUMPETERSTRAALE (*lifting his glass*)
 Ah, Swedish steel—!

HERR VON EBERKOPF.

Yes, first and foremost
 We offer homage to the man
 Who is a swordsman.
 [*They clink glasses and drink with* PEER GYNT
who is beginning to get heated with wine]

MR COTTON

 All you've said
Is excellent, but now, sir, pray
Tell us what you propose to do
With all your wealth

PEER GYNT (*smiling*).

Do with it, eh?

ALL (*drawing nearer to him*).

Yes, let us hear!

PEER GYNT

 Well, first of all,
To travel, and that's why, you see,
I took you all on board my yacht
As company I had a mind
To have a choir to worship at
My Altar of the Golden Calf——

HERR VON EBERKOPF.

How witty!

MR COTTON.

 Yes, but no one sails
For the mere pleasure of a journey.
You have an object, without doubt;
What is it?

PEER GYNT.

To be Emperor.

ALL.

What!

PEER GYNT (*nodding his head*).

To be Emperor.

ALL

But where?

PEER GYNT

Of the whole world

MONSIEUR BALLON

But how, my friend—?

PEER GYNT

Just simply by the power of gold!
It's not a new idea at all,
It has inspired my every effort
In boyish dreams I used to travel
Over the sea upon a cloud,
I tried to soar to fancied grandeurs,
And then dropped down on to all-fours;
But to its goal my mind was constant.
Somewhere—I can't remember where—
It says that if a man shall win
The whole wide world, but lose *himself*,
All that he gains is only like
A wreath upon an empty skull
That's what it says—or something like it—
And, trust me, it is pretty true

HERR VON EBERKOPF

But what, then, is the Gyntian Self?

PEER GYNT

The world which lies within my brain,
Which makes me *me*, and no one else—
No more than God can be the Devil

HERR TRUMPETERSTRAALE

Now I can see at what you're driving!

MONSIEUR BALLON.

Sublime philosopher!

HERR VON EBERKOPF

Great poet!

PEER GYNT (*with growing exaltation*)

The Gyntian Self!—An army, that,
Of wishes, appetites, desires!
The Gyntian Self! It is a sea
Of fancies, claims and aspirations,
In fact, it's all that swells within
My breast, and makes it come about
That I am I and live as such
But, just as our Good Lord had need
Of earthly mould to be earth's God,
So I have need of lots of gold
If I'm to be an Emperor

MONSIEUR BALLON.

But you are rich!

PEER GYNT

Not rich enough
Enough, perhaps, for me to pose
For two or three days as a princeling
In some such place as Lippe-Detmold,
But I must be *myself*—complete—
A Gynt fit for the universe—
Sir Peter Gynt from head to heels!

MONSIEUR BALLON (*in transports*)

To purchase all the loveliest things
The world can offer!

HERR VON EBERKOPF

All the bins
Of century-old Johannisberger!

HERR TRUMPETERSTRAALE

The armoury of Charles the Twelfth!

MR COTTON.

But, before all, to seize the chance
Of profitable business

PEER GYNT

Well,
I've found a way to get them all,
And that is why we're anchored here;
To-night our course will be to northward.
The newspapers I've just received
Have brought me some important news
[Rises and lifts his glass
It shows that fortune always favours
Those who have confidence to grasp it—

ALL

Well? Tell us—!

PEER GYNT

Greece is in an uproar.

ALL (*springing to their feet*).

What, have the Greeks—?

PEER GYNT.

They have revolted

ALL

Hurrah!

PEER GYNT

And Turkey's in a hole.

MONSIEUR BALLON

To Greece! The way to glory's open!
I'll help them with my sword of France!

HERR VON EBERKOPF

I with my voice—but at a distance!

MR COTTON

I'll get a contract to supply them!

HERR TRUMPETERSTRAALE

Let us away! I'll find at Bender¹
Charles the Twelfth's famous spur-buckles!

MONSIEUR BALLON

(*falling on PEER GYNT's neck*).

Forgive me, friend, if for a moment
I had misjudged you!

HERR VON EBERKOPF

(*grasping PEER GYNT by the hand*).

I'm a fool!

I almost took you for a scoundrel!

MR COTTON

That's much too strong—say, rather, for
A simpleton——

HERR TRUMPETERSTRAALE

(*embracing PEER GYNT*)

And I, dear friend,

Had put you down as an example
Of the worst type of Yankee rascal!
Forgive me!

HERR VON EBERKOPF.

We were all mistaken——

¹ A town in Bessarabia, on the Dniester, where Charles XII spent his years of exile after his defeat at Pultawa in 1709. The allusion to the spur-buckles is explained as referring to the spurs with which Charles XII is said in a fit of anger to have torn the garments of the Turkish emissary who brought him the news that the Sultan had concluded a truce with Russia.

PEER GYNT.

What do you mean?

HERR VON EBERKOPF.

We now can glimpse
The banners of the Gyntian army
Of wishes, appetites, desires—!

MONSIEUR BALLON (*admiringly*).

That's what you meant by "being a Gynt"!

HERR VON EBERKOPF (*in the same tone*).

A Gynt that's worthy of all honour!

PEER GYNT.

But tell me—?

MONSIEUR BALLON

Don't you understand?

PEER GYNT

I'm hanged if I can take your meaning

MONSIEUR BALLON

Why, aren't you going to help the Greeks
With money and with ships?

PEER GYNT (*whistling*)

No, thank you!
I'm going to help the stronger side,
And lend my money to the Turks.

MONSIEUR BALLON.

Impossible!

HERR VON EBERKOPF

That's very funny!—

But you of course must have your joke!

[PEER GYNT *is silent for a moment, then leans on a chair and assumes an air of importance*

PEER GYNT

Gentlemen, we had better part
Before the last remains of friendship
Dissolve like wreaths of smoke The man
Who hasn't anything may lightly
Take any chances, those whose all
Is no more than the scrap of earth
They stand on, are the fittest far
For sacrifice and cannon-fodder
But when a man's well off, as I am,
He risks a greater stake than they
Pray go to Greece I'll land you there,
And furnish you with weapons gratis,
The more you fan the flames of strife,
The better it will be for me
Strike hard for Freedom and the Right!
Attack the Turks and give them hell,
And meet a glorious end upon
A janissary's spear-point —But,
Excuse me if I don't come with you.

[*Slaps his pockets*

I've money in my pockets, and
I am Myself—Sir Peter Gynt

[*Puts up his umbrella and goes into the grove where the hammocks are hanging*

HERR TRUMPETERSTRAALE.

The swine!

MONSIEUR BALLON.

He has no sense of honour!

Peer Gynt

MR COTTON.

Oh, honour—let that pass But think
What splendid profits we could make
If only Greece could free herself——

MONSIEUR BALLON

I saw myself acclaimed a victor
By crowds of lovely Grecian women!

HERR TRUMPETERSTRAALE.

I felt those famous buckles safe
Within my Swedish grasp!

HERR VON EBERKOPF

I saw
My glorious fatherland's *Kultur*
Spread widely over land and sea——

MR COTTON

The actual loss is worst of all
Goddam!¹—I feel inclined to cry!
I saw myself proprietor
Of Mount Olympus, which contains
(Unless what men have said is false)
Rich veins of copper to be worked,
And the renowned Castalian stream—
Its many waterfalls would yield
A thousand horse-power, easily!

HERR TRUMPETERSTRAALE

I shall go, all the same! My sword
Is worth more, still, than Yankee gold.

MR COTTON.

Perhaps, but, fighting in the ranks,
We should be merely swamped by numbers.
What profit should we get from that?

¹ So in the original

MONSIEUR BALLON.

Curse it! So near the heights of fortune—
And then to be dashed down again

MR COTTON (*shaking his fist at the yacht*).

To think that all this nabob's gold
That he has sweated from his niggers
Is in that ship!

HERR VON EBERKOPF

An inspiration!
Come on, and let us act! His empire
Shall come to nothing now! Hurrah!

MONSIEUR BALLON

What will you do?

HERR VON EBERKOPF

I'll seize his power!
The crew will easily be bought
On board! I'll commandeer his yacht!

MR COTTON

You'll—what?

HERR VON EBERKOPF

I mean to bag the lot
[*Goes towards the jolly-boat*]

MR COTTON

It's clearly to my interest
To share with you [Follows him]

HERR TRUMPETERSTRAALE

There goes a scamp!

MONSIEUR BALLON

A proper scoundrel! But—*enfin*!
[Follows the others]

HERR TRUMPETERSTRAALE.

Well, I suppose I may as well
 Go with them—under protest, though!
[Follows

SCENE II

(SCENE —*Another part of the coast Moonlight and passing clouds Out at sea the yacht is seen steaming at full speed* PEER GYNT *is running along the shore, now pinching himself in the arm, now staring out to sea*)

PEER GYNT

It's nightmare!—Illusion!—I soon shall wake up!
 It's heading to sea! And at top of its speed!
 It's a dream, and I'm sleeping! I'm drunk or I'm mad!
[Wrings his hands
 It's impossible that I should perish like this!
[Tears his hair
 It's a dream! It *must* be—it *shall* be—a dream!
 It's terrible! Ah, but alas it is true!
 My scoundrelly friends—! Oh, hear me, Good Lord!
 You are Wisdom and Justice—oh, punish them, Lord!
[Stretches up his arms
 It is I—Peter Gynt! Do look after me, Lord!
 Take care of me, Father, or else I shall die!
 Make them slacken the engines—or cast off the gig!
 Stop the robbers! Make something go wrong with
 the works!
 Do listen! Leave other folk's matters alone!
 The world will look after itself while You do.—
 He's not listening. He is as deaf as a post!
 It's too much! A God that can't think what to do!
[Beckons up to the sky
 I say! I've disposed of my negro plantation,
 And sent heaps of missionaries out to Asia

Don't You think that one good turn's deserving another?

Oh, help me to get on the ship—!

[A sudden glare rises into the sky from the yacht, followed by a thick cloud of smoke. A dull explosion is heard. PEER GYNT utters a shriek and sinks down on the sand. The smoke gradually disperses and the yacht is seen to have disappeared. PEER GYNT looks up, with a pale face, and says in a low voice]

'Twas a judgment!

Sunk with all hands in a moment of time!

All thanks to the chances of fortune *[Emotionally.]*

No, no!

There was more than the chances of fortune in this,
That I should be saved while the rest of them perish.
Thanks be to Thee who hast been my protector
And kept an eye on me in spite of my failings!

[Takes a deep breath.]

What a wonderful feeling of safety and comfort
It gives you to know that you're specially guarded!
But where shall I find meat and drink in the desert?
I don't know, I'm sure. But He will understand
It *can't* be so dangerous —

[In a loud and insinuating voice.]

He will not suffer

Such a poor little sparrow as I am to perish!
I must humble myself—and allow Him some time.
The Lord will provide, I must not be downhearted —

[Springs to his feet with a cry of terror.]

Did I hear a lion? That growl in the rushes—?

[His teeth chatter.]

No, it was no lion

[Pulls himself together.]

I'm certain it was!

Those creatures, of course, know to keep at a distance,
They dare not take bites at a lord of creation
They have instinct, of course, it's by instinct they
feel

That an elephant's not a safe thing to attack —

All the same, I will see if I can't find a tree.

Ah, there I see palms and acacias waving,
 If I climb one of them, I'll get safety and shelter—
 Especially if I can only remember
 Some psalms to repeat.— [*Climbs up a tree*
 “Lo, morning and evening
 Are different things”—that's a verse that is often
 Discussed and examined [*Settles himself in the tree*
 How pleasant it is
 To feel that one's soul is so nobly uplifted!
 Thoughts that ennoble are worth more than riches
 I'll trust myself to Him He knows just how far
 I am able to drink of the cup of affliction
 He takes a most fatherly interest in me—
 [*Looks out over the sea, and whispers with a sigh*
 But He's not what you'd call economical over it!

SCENE III

(SCENE — *A Moroccan camp on the edge of the desert,
 at night WARRIORS are resting by a watch-fire*)

A SLAVE (*running in and tearing his hair*).
 Gone is the Emperor's white charger!

ANOTHER SLAVE
 (*running in and rending his garments*).
 The Emperor's sacred garb is stolen!

A CHIEF OF THE WARRIORS (*coming in*).
 A hundred strokes of the bastinado
 To all of you, if the thieves escape!
 [*The WARRIORS spring on to their steeds and
 gallop off in all directions.*

SCENE IV

(SCENE.—*A clump of palm-trees and acacias It is dawn* PEER GYNT, *in a tree, is trying to defend himself with a broken-off branch against a swarm of Apes*)

PEER GYNT

I've spent an extremely uncomfortable night

[*Hits about him*

Is that them again? The infernal creatures!

They're throwing down fruit No, it's something else

Apes are the most disgusting beasts!

It is written that one must watch and fight,

But I can't do it—I'm wearied out

[*Is disturbed again Speaks impatiently.*

I must make an end of all this discomfort—

Try and get hold of one of these creatures,

Hang him and flay him and dress myself up

From head to foot in his shaggy hide,

Then the others will think I am one of them —

We men are but nothing, after all,

And must bow to the force of circumstances —

Another lot! Why, they swarm like flies!

Away with you! Shoo! They act like madmen

If only I could get a false tail—

Or something to make me look like a beast—

What's that up there above my head? [*Looks up*

An old one—his paws chock-full of filth!

[*Crouches down nervously and keeps still for a*

little The Ape makes a movement; PEER

GYNT tries to coax him, as one would a dog

Hullo, old man! Is that you up there?

He's a good chap, if you speak to him kindly

He won't throw things down—will he? No!

It's I! Good dog! We're the best of friends

Wuff, wuff! Do you hear, I can speak your language?

Old man and I are as good as cousins!

Would he like a nice big bit of sugar—?

The dirty beast! He's thrown the lot
 All over me! Disgusting brute!—
 Or was it food, perhaps? Its taste
 Was unfamiliar, certainly
 But taste is mostly a thing of habit.
 What is it that some philosopher
 Has said You must just spit, and trust
 To force of habit —Here's the crowd
 Of youngsters now! [Hits about him
 This is too much!
 That man, who's his Creator's image,
 Should have to suffer —Murder! Help!
 The old one's foul, but the youngsters fouler!

SCENE V

(SCENE —A rocky spot overlooking the desert It is early morning On one side, a ravine with the entrance to a cave. A THIEF and a RECEIVER OF STOLEN GOODS are standing in the ravine, with the Emperor's charger and robe The charger, richly caparisoned, is tied to a rock HORSEMEN are seen in the distance)

THIEF

Spear-points, gleaming
 In the sunshine!
 See! see!

RECEIVER

I hear them galloping
 Over the sand!
 Woe! Woe!

THIEF (*folding his arms on his breast*).
 My father thieved,
 His son must steal

RECEIVER

My father received,
 And so must I

THIEF

We must bear our lot,
And be ourselves

RECEIVER (*listening*).

Footsteps in the thicket!
Away! But where?

THIEF.

The cave is deep
And the Prophet great!

[*They fly, leaving the stolen goods behind them*
The HORSEMEN disappear in the distance
PEER GYNT comes in, whittling a reed

PEER GYNT

Really a most enchanting morning!
The beetles are busy at work in the sand,
Out of their shells the snails are peeping
Morning! Ah, morning's worth more than gold!
It's strange what a very remarkable power
There is in daylight In its beams
You feel so safe—your courage waxes—
You're ready to fight wild bulls, if need be
What silence around me! These rural joys—
It's strange that I never appreciated
These things so much till now To think
That men live cooped up in great cities,
Just to be pestered and plagued by people.
Look at those lizards, bustling about
Enjoying the air and thinking of nothing
What innocence in the life of beasts!
They perform the behest of their great Creator,
Their character stamped indelibly on them,
They are *themselves*, whether playing or fighting—
Themselves, as they were when He first said "Be"
[*Puts on his eye-glasses*
A toad—looking out of a piece of sandstone,
Only his head peeping out of his chamber.

He sits, as if looking out of a window
 At the world, to himself he is—enough,
[Thoughtfully]

Enough? Where have I read that before?
 Most probably in the Great Book I read
 As a boy. Or perhaps it was in the Prayer-book?
 Or else set down in Solomon's Proverbs?

Dear me—I notice, as years go on,
 I cannot remember times and places
 As once I used *[Sits down in the shade]*

Here's a spot that's cool,
 I'll sit and rest my bones awhile
 Ah, here are ferns—one can eat the roots

[Tastes one]

It's really food for beasts, but then
 The Book says we must subdue our natures,
 And, further, that pride must be abased
 "Who humbleth himself, shall be exalted" *[Uneasily.]*
 Exalted? Of course that will happen to me—
 The contrary's quite unthinkable.

Fate surely will help me away from here
 And set my feet on the road to fortune
 This is but a test, if the Lord will grant me
 Strength to endure, I'll be rescued later

*[Shakes off such thoughts, lights a cigar, stretches
 himself out and gazes over the desert]*

What an enormous, boundless waste!—
 Far off, there, I can see an ostrich —
 It is hard to perceive the Almighty's purpose
 In all this dead and empty desert,
 Where there is nothing that is life-giving,
 A burnt-up waste that profits no one,
 This bit of the world that's for ever sterile;
 A corpse that never, since it was shaped,
 Has brought its Creator anything—
 Not even thanks Why was it made?
 Nature is ever extravagant —
 Is that the sea that glitters yonder,
 Away in the east? No—only mirage.
 The sea's to the west, where, like a dam,

Sandhills protect the desert from it

[*An idea strikes him*]

A dam! Then I might—! The hills are low

A dam! Then a cutting—a canal—

And through the gap the rushing waters

Would fill the desert with a life-flood,

And all this empty burnt-up grave

Become a fresh and rippling ocean!

Islands would show in it where now

There are oases, to the north,

Atlas would fringe the shore with verdure,

And to the south, like heedless birds,

White sails would skim along, where now

The caravans plod painfully,

A lively breeze would dissipate

This stuffy air, and from the clouds

A gentle dew would fall In time

Town after town would be established,

And grass grow round the swaying palm-trees.

The country beyond the Sahara's edge,

Away in the south, would become a land

Of busy trade and seamen's ventures

Steam should drive works in Tombuktu,

New colonies arise in Bornu,

And the explorer should be carried

Safe in his waggon through the land

Of Habes¹ to the Upper Nile.

Then in the middle of my sea,

On the most fertile, rich oasis,

I'll settle Norsemen—for the blood

Of dalesmen is the nearest thing

To that of royalty, a cross

With Arab blood will do the rest

And on a cape with sloping shore

I'll build Peeropolis, the capital!

The old world's out of date, and now

It is the turn of Gyntiana,²

¹ The Arabic name for Abyssinia

² The Norwegian violinist Ole Bull had founded with disastrous financial results, a Norwegian colony of "Oleana" in America on the model approved by the French Socialists

My new-born land! [*Springs up*]

I only need
Some capital, and the thing is done—
A golden key, and the ocean's gate
Is open! A crusade 'gainst death!
That grisly miser shall disgorge
The hidden treasure that he's hoarding.
There is a world-wide wish for freedom.
Like Noah's donkey in the Ark,
I'll bray my message to the world,
Liberty's baptism I will pour
Over these prisoned shores, till they
Grow lovely in their freedom!—Forward!
In east or west I'll have to seek
The money for the work! My kingdom—
Or half my kingdom—for a horse!

[*The horse in the ravine neighs*]
A horse! And robes! And ornaments!
And weapons! [*Goes nearer*]

It's impossible—
And yet it's true!—I know I've read
Somewhere that faith can move a mountain,
But never thought that it could bring
A horse! I must be dreaming—No,
It is a fact—there stands the horse!
Ab esse ad posse, etcetera —

[*Puts on the robe and looks himself over*]
Sir Peter—and Turk from head to foot!
Well, truly one can never tell
What's going to happen to one! Come up,
Grane, my steed! [*Climbs into the saddle*]

Gold stirrups, too!
Great folk are known by the steeds they ride!
[*Gallops away across the desert*]

SCENE VI

(SCENE —*The tent of an Arab Chieftain, on an oasis*
PEER GYNT, *in his oriental robes, is taking his ease*
on a divan, drinking coffee and smoking a long pipe
ANITRA *and a troupe of GIRLS are dancing and singing*
to him.)

CHORUS OF GIRLS.

The Prophet is come!
The Prophet, the Lord, the All-Wise One,
To us, to us he has come,
Riding over the sea of sand!
The Prophet, the Lord, the Infallible,
To us, to us he has come,
Sailing over the sea of sand!
Blow flute! Sound drum!
The Prophet, the Prophet is come!

ANITRA

His charger is white as milk
In the streams of Paradise!
Bend the knee! Bow low!
His eyes are stars that flash
And yet are full of love
No earth-born eyes can meet
The flashing of those stars!
Across the desert he came,
Decked with gold and pearls.
Where he rode it was light,
Behind him all was dark,
Drought and the dread simoom.
The Mighty One has come!
Over the desert he came,
Clothed in mortal shape
Kaaba is empty now!
Himself has told us so.

CHORUS OF GIRLS.

Blow flute! Sound drum!

The Prophet, the Prophet is come!

[*The girls dance to soft music*

PEER GYNT

I have read in a book, and the saying's true,
 That no man's a prophet in his own country.—
 This life's a deal more to my liking
 Than that which I led as a Charlestown trader.
 There was something false about it all,
 Something foreign to me, and shady,
 I never could feel myself at home,
 Or feel I had chosen the right profession,
Qu'allais-je faire dans cette galère,
 Grubbing about with business matters?
 I can't understand it, the more I try—
 It simply happened, and that is all
 To climb up the world on money-bags
 Is just like building a house on sand
 If you wear rings and a watch and so forth,
 People will curtsy and bow to you,
 Take off their hats if you wear a breast-pin;
 But the rings and the pin are not yourself
 Now a Prophet—he has a definite status,
 You know exactly where you're standing,
 If a man salutes you, it's for *yourself*,
 And not because of your pounds and shillings.
 You are what you are, without pretence.
 Owing nothing to chance or accident,
 Independent of patents or concessions.
 A Prophet—yes, that's the life for me.
 And it happened so unexpectedly—
 Simply from riding across the desert
 And coming upon these children of nature.
 The Prophet had come, it was clear to them.
 But indeed it was not my design to deceive them—
 An official reply from a Prophet is one thing,
 And a lie quite another, in any case, too,

I can always retire from my present position
I'm in no way bound, so it's not so bad
It's all, so to speak, like a private arrangement
I can go as I came, my steed's standing ready,
In short, I am master of the situation

ANITRA (*at the door of the tent*)

Prophet and Master!

PEER GYNT

What is it, my slave?

ANITRA

At the door of the tent stand sons of the desert,
Craving to look on the face of the Prophet—

PEER GYNT

Stop! You can tell them they must keep their
distance,
I will receive their petitions at a distance
Tell them no man may set his foot within here!
Menfolk, my child, are but a set of scoundrels—
They are, in fact, a filthy lot of rascals
You, my Anitra, cannot well imagine
With what barefaced impertinence they cheat one—
H'm!—I should say, how grievously they sin Now,
No more of that! Come, dance for me, my children!
I would forget these thoughts that make me angry

THE GIRLS (*as they dance*)

The Prophet is good! His heart is distressed
For the sins that the sons of earth have committed
The Prophet is kind! All praise to his kindness
Which leads such poor sinners to Paradise!

PEER GYNT

(*whose eyes have followed ANITRA through the dance*).

Her legs flit about like nimble drumsticks!
She's really a tasty morsel, the baggage!

It's true her figure's pronounced in some ways—
Not quite in accord with the standards of beauty,
But what is beauty? A mere convention,
A currency coined for a special purpose
And it's just these extravagances that tickle
A palate that's sated with what is normal.
In marriage there's always something wanting,
She's either too fat or else too scraggy,
Annoyingly young or alarmingly ancient,
And if she's between the two, she's insipid.—
Her feet, it is true, might well be cleaner,
Also her arms—especially that one
But, after all, that's nothing to matter,
One might rather call it a qualification —
Anitra, come here!

ANITRA

Thy slave, my Master!

PEER GYNT

You attract me, child! The Prophet is moved.
If you don't believe me, I'll prove it to you—
I'll make you a Houri in Paradise!

ANITRA

Impossible, Master!

PEER GYNT.

You don't believe me?
As I am alive, I'm in real earnest!

ANITRA

But I've no soul!

PEER GYNT

Then you shall have one!

ANITRA.

How shall I, Master?

PEER GYNT

That's my affair.

I shall look after your education
No soul? It's true you are pretty stupid,
I've noticed that fact with some regret,
But there's room enough in you for a soul.
Come here! Let me measure your head Oh, yes,
There's plenty of room, as I knew there was
True enough, you'll never be anything much,
A great soul will be quite beyond you
But, pshaw! it really doesn't matter,
You'll have enough to prevent your feeling
Ashamed of it——

ANITRA

My Lord is kind——

PEER GYNT

You're hesitating? What is the matter?

ANITRA

I'd rather have——

PEER GYNT

Speak out, at once!

ANITRA

I don't care so much about having a soul,
I'd rather have——

PEER GYNT.

What?

ANITRA (*pointing to his turban*).

That lovely opal!

PEER GYNT (*in raptures, as he hands her the jewel*).

Anitra, you're one of Eve's true daughters!
Your charm attracts me—for I'm a man,
And, as a noted writer puts it
" *Das ewig weibliche zieht uns an.*"

SCENE VII

(SCENE — *A grove of palm-trees outside ANITRA'S tent*
The moon is shining PEER GYNT, *with an Arabian*
lute in his hands, is sitting under a tree *His beard and*
hair have been trimmed, which makes him look con-
siderably younger)

PEER GYNT (*plays and sings*).

I locked the gate of Paradise
And took away the key
My bark afar the north wind bore,
While lovely women on the shore
Were weeping there for me
Southward I sailed the salty depths
Before the die was cast,
Where palms were waving proud and free
Around an inlet of the sea,
I burned my ship at last.

A desert-ship I mounted then—
A four-legged ship, I trow—
To bear me o'er the desert dark.
I am a bird of passage! Hark!
I'm twittering on a bough!

Anitra, thou art like the wine
Of palm-trees, sparkling clear!
Angora-goats'-milk cheese is good,
But it's not half so sweet a food
As thou, Anitra dear!

[*Slings the lute over his shoulder and approaches*
the tent

All is silent! Now I wonder
If she heard my little song?
Is she there behind the curtain,
Peeping out with nothing on?
What's that sound? It's like a bottle
Someone is uncorking!—There!
There again I heard it!—Is it
Sighs of love?—a lover's song?—
No, it's clearly someone snoring.
Lovely sound! Anitra sleeps!
Nightingales, desist from singing!
You shall suffer if you dare
With your silly cluck and gurgle—
Oh, well, after all—sing on!
Every nightingale's a songster,
Just as I am one myself,
With their notes, like me, they capture
Tender, delicate young hearts.
Night's cool hours are meant for singing,
Singing is our common sphere,
Singing is the art of being
Us—Peer Gynt and nightingale.
And to hear Anitra sleeping
Is the topmost bliss of love,
It's like lifting up a goblet
To the lips, but drinking naught.—
Oh, but here she comes! Well, really,
After all that is the best

ANITRA (*at her tent door*)

Did I hear my Master calling?

PEER GYNT

Yes, my dear, the Prophet called.
I was wakened by a hubbub,
Cats were fighting all around—

ANITRA

Ah, they were not fighting, Master
It was something worse than that

Peer Gynt

PEER GYNT

What was it?

ANITRA

Oh, spare me!

PEER GYNT

Tell me!

ANITRA.

I am blushing!

PEER GYNT (*going close to her*).

Do you mean

The emotion I was feeling

When you had my opal, dear?

ANITRA (*horrified*)Don't compare yourself, great Master,
To an old disgusting cat!

PEER GYNT

Child—considered just as lovers,
There's perhaps not much to choose
'Twixt a tom-cat and a Prophet

ANITRA

Honeyed jests, great Master, fall
From your lips

PEER GYNT

My little friend,

You, like other girls, pass judgment
Solely by a great man's looks.

I am really very playful—

Especially when *tête-à-tête*

My position makes it needful

For me to put on a mask

Of most serious behaviour,
I'm constrained by daily duties,
And the nature of the business
Relative to my great office,
To assume a weighty manner,
And at times may seem to others
Too prophetically abrupt,
But 'tis all upon the surface —
Away with all that bosh! In private
I am Peer—that's who I am
Come, now, I will drop the Prophet,
You shall know my very self!

[Sits down under a tree and draws ANITRA closer to him]

Come, Anitra, let us dally
Underneath this waving palm!
You shall smile and I shall whisper
Nothings in your ear, and then
We'll reverse the parts we're playing,
Your sweet lips shall whisper love
In my ear while I sit smiling!

ANITRA (*lying at his feet*).

All you say is sweet as music,
Though I don't quite understand
Tell me, Master, can your daughter
Get a soul by listening?

PEER GYNT

Presently you shall be dowered
With that light of life—a soul,
When upon the rosy portals
Of the dawn we see in gold
“ I am daybreak ” clearly written,—
Then it will be time enough
To begin your education
But for me to play schoolmaster,
And to waste this lovely night
Trying to collect together

Weatherbeaten bits of lore,
Would be stupid altogether,
Even if I wanted to
And, besides, considered rightly,
Souls are not the chiefest things
In our lives, it's hearts that matter.

ANITRA

Speak on, Master! When you speak,
It's like opals flashing fire

PEER GYNT

Too much cleverness is folly,
And the fruit of cowardice
Pushed too far, is cruelty.
Truth, if it's exaggerated,
Is no more than wisdom's self
Turned hind-foremost — Yes, my child,
You may take my word for it,
There are people in the world
Gorged with soul but dull of vision
I once knew a chap like that,
He seemed brighter than his fellows,
Yet he let resounding phrases
Which he did not understand
Quite mislead him from his business —
Look around this fair oasis,
At the desert, if my turban
I took off and fluttered gently
Once or twice, the mighty ocean
At my bidding would invade it,
Filling up its every corner
But I'd be a silly cuckoo
If I set about creating
Seas and continents Do you know,
My child, what life is?

ANITRA

No, instruct me.

PEER GYNT.

Iife means passing safe and dry-shod
Down the rushing stream of time.
Manly strength is what is needed
To be what I am, my dear
Age makes eagles lose their feathers,
Makes old fogies' footsteps fail,
Sets an old crone's teeth decaying,
Gives an old man withered hands,—
And they all get withered souls
Give me youth! I mean as Sultan,
Ardent and vigorous, to rule—
Not the realms of Gyntiana
With their palm-trees and their vines—
But the realm of fresh young beauty
That lies in a maiden's thoughts.

So you see, my child, the reason
Why I graciously was pleased
To bestow my love upon you;
Why I chose your little heart,
So to speak, to be the empire
That shall be my caliphate
None but I shall know your longings;
In the empire of my love
I must reign supreme, unquestioned!
For you must be mine alone
I shall be your gentle gaoler,
Binding you with gold and gems.
If we part, life will be empty—
Or, at any rate, for you!
Not a fibre of your being,
Not an instinct of your will,
But shall know me as their master—
You shall be so filled with me
And your raven locks—your beauty—
All in you that can allure—
These shall be a pleasant garden
For your Sultan's foot to tread
And that's why it's really lucky

ANITRA.

What do you want to do?

PEER GYNT

To play
At dove and falcon! To carry you off,
And do all sorts of reckless things!

ANITRA

For shame! An old Prophet, too!

PEER GYNT

Oh, bosh!
The Prophet is not old, you goose!
Do you think this looks as if he were old?

ANITRA

Let me go! I want to go home!

PEER GYNT

You flirt!
Home! To father-in-law! That's good!
We birds that have flown out of our cage
Dare not be seen by him again
Besides, my child, no one should stay
Too long in the same place, he's apt
To lose as much in estimation
As he can gain by making friends,
And this is specially the case
When he's a Prophet, or the like
His should be flying visits—seen
As snatches of a song are heard
It was time that my visit should come to an end,
These sons of the desert are shifty creatures,—
Incense and gifts have both been lacking
For some days

ANITRA

Yes, but *are* you a Prophet?

PEER GYNT

I am your Emperor!

[Tries to kiss her, but she draws back]

Oh, come!

Don't be a proud little birdie, now!

ANITRA

Give me the ring that's on your finger.

PEER GYNT

Take the lot if you wish, dear!

ANITRA

Your words are like life-giving music!

PEER GYNT.

What happiness 'tis to be loved like this!

Let me dismount! I will lead the horse

And be your slave!

[Hands her the whip and dismounts]

See now, my pretty,

My beautiful rose—here am I now,

And here I'll tread the sands until

I get a sunstroke and have to stop

I am young, Anitra! Remember that!

You mustn't look at my deeds too closely;

Jokes and fun are what youth is known by!

And, if you were not quite so stupid,

My graceful flower, you'd understand

That, since your lover is full of fun,

Ergo he's young!

ANITRA

Yes, you are young.

Have you any more rings?

PEER GYNT

Of course I'm young!

Look, I am bounding like a deer!

If there was any green-stuff handy,
I'd make myself a wreath! Aha!
Of course I'm young! Just see me dance!

[Dances and sings]

I am a happy little cock!
Peck me, my little pullet!
Houp-là! Just see me foot it!
I am a happy little cock!

ANITRA

You're sweating, my Prophet; I'm afraid you will
melt
Let me carry that bag that weighs down on your belt.

PEER GYNT

What tender concern! You shall carry the purse,
Hearts that are loving have no need of gold!
[Dances and sings again.]

He is a madcap, your little Peer!
He doesn't know what he is doing!
And doesn't care—if he keeps going!
He is a madcap, your little Peer!

ANITRA

How joyful 'tis to see the Prophet dancing!

PEER GYNT

Oh, drop that "Prophet" nonsense! Let's put on
Each other's clothes! Come on! You take yours off!

ANITRA

Your caftan is too long, your belt too roomy,
Your stockings much too small

PEER GYNT

Eh bien ¹ Instead,
Inflict some pain upon me, for 'tis sweet

¹ So in the original

For loving hearts to suffer for their love!
And, when we come to where my castle stands——

ANITRA

Your Paradise? Have we got far to ride?

PEER GYNT.

A thousand miles or so!

ANITRA

Oh, what a way!

PEER GYNT

Then you shall have the soul I promised you——

ANITRA

No, thanks, I think I'll do without the soul
But you were asking for some pain——

PEER GYNT

Something severe but brief—a passing pang—! Ah, yes!

ANITRA

Anitra must obey the Prophet! So—
Farewell!

*[Hits him smartly over the fingers with the whip,
and gallops back over the desert at full speed.]*

PEER GYNT

(after standing for a long time as if thunderstruck).

Well, I am—!

SCENE IX

(SCENE —*The same as the preceding, an hour later*
PEER GYNT *is taking off his Turkish dress bit by bit, deliberately and thoughtfully* When he has finished, he takes a travelling-cap out of his coat pocket, puts it on, and stands once more in European dress. He flings the turban far away from him)

PEER GYNT

There lies the Turk, and here stand I!
A pagan existence is no good at all.
It's lucky that I can throw it away
With the clothes, and that it's not bred in the bone.
Qu'allais-je faire dans cette galère ?
It's certainly best to live as a Christian,
Avoid the temptation of sumptuous garments,
Fashion your life by what's lawful and moral,
In fact, be yourself—and deserve at the last
A funeral oration and wreaths on your coffin
[*Takes a few steps.*]

The baggage!—Only a little more,
And I believe she'd have turned my head.
But I'll be hanged if I understand
What it was in her that so upset me.
I am well out of it! If the joke
Had been pursued a little farther,
It would have made me ridiculous —
I have erred, no doubt, but it's comforting
To feel that my erring was the result
Of the position I had assumed,
It was not I, myself, that erred
It was, as a fact, the prophetic life—
Devoid of any savouring salt
Of active work—that caused in me
These lapses into want of taste
It's a sorry business being a Prophet!
In the course of your duties you're apt to get heedless.

You're sober and dignified, all of a sudden
You find you're nothing of the sort
I certainly gave proof of it
By paying homage to that goose,
Still, all the same— *[Bursts out laughing]*

Just think of it!

Spending the time in wanton dancing!
Trying to stem the stream of life
By fooling like that!—sweet music,
Caresses, sighs—and in the end
Be plucked like any silly hen!
Prophetically wild behaviour!—
Plucked!—To my shame, I've been plucked badly!
Still, I've a little left in hand,—
Some in America, and some
Safe in my pocket, so I'm not
Quite on the rocks And, after all,
A moderate amount of wealth
Is best I am no longer tied
By horses, coachmen and the like;
I've neither carriages nor luggage
To give me trouble In a word,
I'm master of the situation —
Which way shall I choose? Many are open.
It's in such choice that wisdom counts
My business life is a finished chapter,
My love affairs, discarded garments,
And I have no mind to retrace my steps.
“Forward or back it's just as far,
Out or in, it's just as narrow”—
As I think it says in some clever book
I must find some new, some ennobling task,
An object that's worth my pains and money.
Suppose I wrote, without concealment,
The story of my life—a book
To serve as a guide and an example
To others after me? Or, wait—!
I've lots of time at my command—
Suppose I become a travelling scholar,
Making a study of bygone ages?

That, I believe, is the thing for me!
I'd always a fancy for history,
And lately I've improved my knowledge.
I'll trace the story of mankind!
Float like a feather upon the stream
Of history, and live again,
As in a dream, the days of old,
See the fierce fights the heroes waged—
But from a vantage-point that's safe,
That of an onlooker, see how
Thinkers were slaughtered, martyrs bled,
How kingdoms rose and kingdoms fell,
Watch epochs of world-history
Grow from their birth, and, in a word,
Skim all the cream of history —
I must try and get hold of a book of Becker's,¹
And go chronologically about it
It's true that my previous knowledge is sketchy,
And history's rather an intricate matter,—
But what is the odds! It frequently happens
That very unusual methods of starting
Lead to the most original outcome —
To see one's goal and drive towards it,
Steeling one's heart, is most uplifting!

[With restrained emotion]

Breaking through every bond that hinders,
Sundering ties of home and friendship,
Bidding adieu to love's soft promptings,
To solve the mystery of truth!

[Wipes a tear from his eye]

That is the test of a real enquirer!
It makes me happy beyond measure
To feel I have solved the great enigma
Of my destiny. I've only, now,
To hold my course through thick and thin!
I think I may be well forgiven
If I feel proud, and call Peer Gynt
A Man, and Manhood's Emperor!

¹ Becker's *Weligeschichte*, which had been translated into Danish

But Egyptian always upon the basis
Of the Gyntian Self I'll wander later
Into Assyria I'll stop short
Of going back to the Creation,
For that would only lead to danger.
I'll skirt the edges of Bible history.
No doubt I'll discover certain traces
That will confirm it, but to go
Minutely into it is not
According to my plan of action

[Sits down on a stone]

I'll rest awhile and wait with patience
Until I've heard the Statue singing
Its customary morning song,
And, after I have had my breakfast,
I'll climb the Pyramid, and then,
If I have time I'll look inside it
Then to the Red Sea, where perhaps
I shall discover King Potiphar's grave.
Then I will be an Asiatic,
In Babylon I'll seek the famous
Hanging Gardens and Concubines—
The fairest products, that's to say,
Of civilization Then a leap,
And I'll be at the walls of Troy,
And thence the sea-route is direct
To beautiful old Athens There,
I shall examine, stone by stone,
The pass Leonidas defended,
I'll make myself familiar
With all the best philosophies,
Find out the gaol where Socrates
Laid down his life as sacrifice—
But, stop a minute, I forgot—
Greece is at war, so for the present
I must put Hellenism aside. *[Looks at his watch]*
What a ridiculous time the sun
Takes in rising! My time's precious
Well, then,—from Troy—that's where I'd got to—
[Gets up and listens.]

I wonder what that curious murmur—?

[*The sun rises.*]

THE MEMNON STATUE (*singing*)

From the demi-god's ashes ¹ arise new-born
 Singing birds
 Zeus, the all-knowing,
 Shaped them for conflict
 Owl of Wisdom,
 Where sleep my birds?
 You must die if you read not
 The Riddle of the Song!

PEER GYNT

I really do believe I heard
 Sounds from the Statue! That would be
 The music of the past I heard
 The rise and fall of the Statue's voice.
 I'll note that down for consideration
 At experts' hands

[*Makes a note in his pocket-book*]

"The Statue sang
 I heard the sounds quite plainly, but
 Could not completely understand
 The words I have, of course, no doubt
 The whole thing was hallucination
 Otherwise, I have not observed
 Anything of importance so far" [*He moves on*]

¹ At Memnon's death, Jove changed the hero's companions into birds that sang wildly and fought fiercely with each other. Ibsen's satire here is said to be directed against the University Professors of Norway, the Owl of Wisdom being the crest of the University. He regarded the professorial wisdom as a dead thing, inasmuch as it merely concerned itself with the past and took no proper part in the conflict for the future of Norway. The Statue here asks Peer, as the representative of the Norwegian people, where the fighting spirit that should have arisen from the ashes of the past is sleeping.

SCENE XII

(SCENE —*Near the village of Gizeh, by the great Sphinx carved out of the rock In the distance are seen the spires and minarets of Cairo* PEER GYNT *arrives, he examines the Sphinx carefully, sometimes through his eye-glass, sometimes through the hollow of his hand*)

PEER GYNT

Now where in the world have I met before
Something I only half remember
That this ugly thing reminds me of?
For met it I have—either north or south.
Was it a man? And, in that case, who?
The Memnon Statue reminded me
Of the Troll King of our fairy tales,
Sitting like that, all stiff and rigid,
Resting his rump on a piece of rock,
But this remarkable mongrel here,
This monster, half lion and half woman—
Have I known it, too, in a fairy tale?
Or have I some real recollection of it?
A fairy tale?—No, I know the chap!
It's the Boyg, if you please, whose skull I cracked—
I mean to say that I dreamt I did,
For I was lying ill of a fever

[*Goes nearer to the Sphinx*

The selfsame eyes, the selfsame lips!
Not quite so sluggish—a bit more cunning—
But in the main points just the same
Well, Boyg, old fellow, you're like a lion,
Seen from behind and in the daylight!
Are you still full of riddles? We'll try, and see;
We'll see if you answer as you did before

[*Calls to the Sphinx*

Hi, Boyg! Who are you?

VOICE (*from behind the Sphinx*)

Ach, Sfinx, wer bist du?

PEER GYNT

What's that? An echo in German? Astounding!

VOICE

Wer bist du?

PEER GYNT

It's got a perfect accent!

The observation's new, and my own

[*Makes a note in his book*

"Echo in German—with Berlin accent"

[*BEGRIFFENFELDT comes from behind the Sphinx.*

BEGRIFFENFELDT

A man!

PEER GYNT

Oh—it was *he* that was talking

[*Makes a further note*

"Came later to another conclusion"

BEGRIFFENFELDT

(*with signs of great excitement*).

Excuse me, Sir—! A vital question—!

What was it brought you here to-day?

PEER GYNT

A visit I'm greeting a friend of my youth.

BEGRIFFENFELDT

The Sphinx?

PEER GYNT

Yes, I knew him in days gone by.

BEGRIFFENFELDT

Splendid!—And after the night I've spent!
My forehead is throbbing as if it would burst!—
You know him, Sir? Then speak! What is he?
Can you tell me that?

PEER GYNT

What is he? Yes,
I can tell you that He is *himself*

BEGRIFFENFELDT (*with a start*)

Ha! Like a flash I see the answer
To life's enigma!—Is it certain
That he's himself?

PEER GYNT

Yes, at least, he said so.

BEGRIFFENFELDT

Himself! The great awakening's come!
[*Takes off his hat*]
Your name, sir?

PEER GYNT

I am called Peer Gynt

BEGRIFFENFELDT

(*with an air of quiet amazement*)

Peer Gynt! Allegorical! What one expected
Peer Gynt? That means the Great Unknown—
The Messiah that was announced to me—

PEER GYNT

No—really? And you came here to find him—?

BEGRIFFENFELDT

Peer Gynt! Profound! Enigmatic! Incisive!
Each word is full of deepest teaching!
What are you?

PEER GYNT (*modestly*)

I have always tried
To be myself And, for the rest,
My passport——

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Enigmatic too!
All an enigma! [*Grasps him by the hand*
Come to Cairo!
Come! I have found the Emperor
Of Exegesis!

PEER GYNT.

Emperor?

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Come!

PEER GYNT

Am I really known—?

BEGRIFFENFELDT

(*dragging him away with him*).

The Emperor
Of Exegesis—based on Self!

SCENE XIII

(SCENE —*In a lunatic asylum at Cairo A big courtyard surrounded by high walls and buildings with barred windows Iron cages on the ground level Three of the KEEPERS are in the courtyard A fourth comes in*)

FOURTH KEEPER

I say, Schafmann—where's the Director?

ANOTHER KEEPER.

He went out this morning, long before dawn

FOURTH KEEPER

I'm afraid something's happened that has upset him,
Because in the night——

ANOTHER

Hush! Here he comes!

[BEGRIFFENFELDT shows PEER GYNT in, locks the
gate and puts the key in his pocket

PEER GYNT (*aside*)

He is a remarkably learned man,
Almost all that he says is beyond understanding
[*Looks round him*
So this, then, is your Savants' Club?

BEGRIFFENFELDT

Yes, here you'll find them, bag and baggage—
The coterie of seventy
Professors of Exegesis Lately
A hundred and three new ones joined them —
[*Calls to the KEEPERS.*
Mikkel, Schlingelberg, Schafmann, Fuchs—
Into the cages with you! Quick!

THE KEEPERS

We!

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Yes—who else? Get on! get on!
As the world's topsy-turvy, we
Must follow suit! [*Shuts them up in the cage.*
The mighty Peer
Has come to us to-day, so you
Can join the others—I will say
No more
[*Locks the cage and throws the key into a well.*

PEER GYNT

But why—my dear Director—?

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Don't call me that! I *was* Director
Until—— Sir, can you keep a secret?
I must unburden myself——

PEER GYNT

What is it?

BEGRIFFENFELDT

Promise me that you will not tremble.

PEER GYNT.

I will try not to

BEGRIFFENFELDT

(takes him into a corner and whispers).

Absolute Reason

Expired at eleven o'clock last night!

PEER GYNT

God help us—!

BEGRIFFENFELDT

Yes, it's a great disaster.

In *my* position, too, you see,
It's doubly disagreeable,
Because this place, until it happened,
Was known as a lunatic asylum.

PEER GYNT

A lunatic asylum!

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Ah,

Not *now*, you understand!

PEER GYNT (*aside, growing pale*).

I see
Exactly how it is, this fellow
Is mad—and not a soul suspects it. [*Moves away*].

BEGRIFFENFELDT (*following him*)

I hope you have really understood me?
To say it's dead is not accurate
It has left itself—got out of its skin
Like my friend Baron Munchausen's fox.¹

PEER GYNT (*trying to get away*).

Excuse me——

BEGRIFFENFELDT (*holding on to him*).

No, it was like an eel,
Not a fox A nail right through its eye—
And there it was, squirming on the wall——

PEER GYNT

How on earth am I to save myself?

BEGRIFFENFELDT

Just one slit round the neck—and pop!
Out of its pelt it came!

PEER GYNT

Quite mad!

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

And now the fact is evident
That this same exit-from-itself
Entails a revolution
In all the world All persons who

¹ "Reynard stood close to a tree In a twinkling I took out my ball, and placed a good spike-nail in its room, fired, and hit him so cleverly that I nailed his brush fast to the tree I now went up to him, took out my hanger, gave him a cross cut over the face, laid hold of my whip, and fairly flogged him out of his fine skin "

Up to that time were known as mad
 At eleven o'clock last night became
 Normal, this, in conformity
 With Reason in its newest phase.
 And, if you consider the matter farther,
 It's clear that from the selfsame hour
 Our so-called wise men all went mad.

PEER GYNT

Speaking of time, my time is precious——

BEGRIFFENFELDT

Your time? You've jogged my memory!
[Opens a door and calls out]
 Come out! The appointed time has come!
 Reason is dead Long live Peer Gynt!

PEER GYNT.

No, my dear friend——!
[The mad folk come one after another into the courtyard]

BEGRIFFENFELDT

Good morning to you!
 Come out and greet the dawn of freedom!
 Your Emperor's here!

PEER GYNT

Their Emperor?

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Certainly!

PEER GYNT.

It's too great an honour——
 Far more than——

BEGRIFFENFELDT

No false modesty
At such a time as this!

PEER GYNT

At least
Give me some respite!—I'm not fit
For such a task, I'm quite dumbfounded!

BEGRIFFENFELDT

The man who guessed the Sphinx's riddle!
Who is himself!

PEER GYNT

That's just my trouble.
I am myself in every way,
But here, so far as I can see,
Everyone gets outside themselves

BEGRIFFENFELDT

Outside themselves? Oh no, you're wrong
It's here that men are most themselves—
Themselves and nothing but themselves—
Sailing with outspread sails of self
Each shuts himself in a cask of self,
The cask stopped with a bung of self
And seasoned in a well of self
None has a tear for others' woes
Or cares what any other thinks
We are ourselves in thought and voice—
Ourselves up to the very limit,
And, consequently, if we want
An Emperor, it's very clear
That you're the man

PEER GYNT

I wish to goodness—!

BEGRIFFENFELDT

Don't be downhearted, everything
 That's new, at first seems strange to one.
 "One's self"—well, as a specimen,
 I'll choose the first that comes to hand
 [To a gloomy figure that is passing]
 Good morning, Huhu! Still, my lad,
 Looking the picture of misery?

HUHU (*a Language-Reformer¹ from Malabar*)

What can I do, when generation
 After generation dies
 Lacking an interpreter? *[To PEER GYNT]*
 You're a stranger, will you listen?

PEER GYNT (*bowing*).

By all means

HUHU

Then pay attention —
 Away in the East, like a bridal crown,
 Lie the shores of Malabar
 Portuguese and Hollanders
 Try to civilize the place,
 Where there still survive a lot
 Of original Malabar
 These good folk have muddled up
 Their language, and now rule supreme
 In that land But, long ago,
 That same countryside was ruled
 By Orang-outangs The woods
 Were all theirs, and they could fight,
 Growl and snarl to hearts' content—
 Live, in fact, as Nature made them,
 They could screech without permission,

¹ The satire in this episode is directed against the "Maalstravere," as a group of national language-reformers were called, whose aim was to rid the Norwegian language of its Danish taint and get back to the old Norse tongue

And were lords of all the country
Then there came this horde of strangers
And disturbed the primal language
That was spoken in the forests
Now four hundred years have passed—
That means many generations—
And so long a time as that,
As one knows, can easily
Stamp out aborigines
The forest cries have long been dumb,
Not a growl is ever heard,
If we want to speak our minds,
We must have recourse to words.
It applies to all alike—
Portuguese and Hollanders,
Hybrid races, Malabar—
All are equally affected
I have tried my best to fight
For our real forest-tongue,
Tried to bring its corpse to life;
Upheld people's right to screech,
Screeched myself, and pointed out
The necessity of screeching
In our folk-songs But my efforts
Met with no result whatever —
Now I think you understand
What my grievance is I thank you
For your courtesy in listening
If you think you can advise me
What to do, I beg you'll tell me!

PEER GYNT (*aside*)

They say that when you are in Rome
You should do as the Romans do [Aloud.
My friend, if I remember rightly,
There are forests in Morocco
Where there are Orang-outangs
That have neither songs nor teacher,
And their language much resembles
That of Malabar, if you

Now you are lying, too!

BEGRIFFENFELDT

Your Highness

Must kindly deign to let us have
An explanation

FELLAH

Well, I will

[*Turns to* PEER GYNT.]

You see this man I'm carrying?

King Apis was his name
They call him now a Mummy,
And, what is more, he's dead.

He built up all the Pyramids,
And carved the mighty Sphinx,
And fought—so the Director says—
With Turks on every side

And therefore the Egyptians
Worshipped him as a God,
And set up in their temples
His statue as a bull

But *I* am that King Apis—
It's just as clear as day,
If you don't understand it,
I'll make you very soon

King Apis was out a-hunting,
And got down from his horse,
And stepped aside for a moment
In my grandfather's field

The soil King Apis fertilized
Has nourished *me* with corn,
And, if more proof is needed,
I have invisible horns

Then don't you think it's damnable
That I can't get my due?
By my birth I am King Apis,
But only a Fellah here

If you think you can advise me,
Tell me, without delay,

What I'm to do to make myself
Like Apis, the great king

PEER GYNT

Your Highness must build Pyramids
And carve a mighty Sphinx,
And fight—as the Director says—
With Turks on every side.

FELLAH.

Yes, that's a likely story!
A Fellah! A hungry louse!
It's all I can do to keep my hut
Clear of the rats and mice
Come, think of something better,
To make me great and safe,
And also make me look like
King Apis that's on my back.

PEER GYNT

Suppose your Highness hanged yourself,
And then, deep in the ground,
Within a coffin's sheltering walls
Behaved like one that's dead——

FELLAH

I'll do it! Let me have a rope!
To the gallows with my head!
I'll not be quite like him at first,
But time will alter that
[Goes away and makes preparations to hang
himself]

BEGRIFFENFELDT

A great personality that, my friend—
A man with method——

PEER GYNT

Yes, so I see —
But he really *is* hanging himself! God help us!
I feel quite sick—and my brain is turning!

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

A transitional stage, it won't last long.

PEER GYNT

Transition? To what? I really must go——

BEGRIFFENFELDT (*holding him back*)

Are you mad?

PEER GYNT

Not yet! Mad? God forbid!
[*Amidst an uproar, HUSSEIN, a Minister of State,
pushes his way through the other lunatics*

HUSSEIN

They tell me an Emperor's come to-day
[*To PEER GYNT*
Is it you?

PEER GYNT (*desperately*)
They've settled that it is!

HUSSEIN

Good.—Here are papers that need an answer.

PEER GYNT (*tearing his hair*)
Aha! Go on! The more the merrier!

HUSSEIN

Perhaps you will honour me with a dip?
[*Bows low.*
I am a pen.

PEER GYNT (*bowing still lower*).

And I am merely
A trumpery imperial parchment

HUSSEIN

My history, Sir, is briefly this.
They think me a sand-box, and not a pen.

PEER GYNT

And mine, Sir Pen, succinctly told
I'm a paper that's never been written on

HUSSEIN

They never will understand what I'm meant for;
They all want to use me to sprinkle sand!

PEER GYNT

I was a book with silver clasps,
When I belonged to a woman once
Madness or wisdom is merely a misprint.

HUSSEIN

But, think—how wretched to be a pen
That never has tasted the edge of a knife!

PEER GYNT (*leaping into the air*).

Think what it is to be a reindeer
That's always jumping down from a height
And never reaching solid ground!

HUSSEIN

A knife! I am blunt, I need repairing!
The world will perish if I'm not mended!

PEER GYNT

That would be sad when, like all that He made,
Our Heavenly Father admired it so much.

BEGRIFFENFELDT.

Here's a knife!

HUSSEIN (*grasping it*)

Ah, how I shall lick up the ink!
How lovely to cut one's self! [*Cuts his throat*]

BEGRIFFENFELDT (*moving to one side*)

Don't splash me!

PEER GYNT (*with growing terror*)

Hold him!

HUSSEIN

Yes, hold me! That's the word!
Hold! Hold the Pen! Is the paper there—? [*Falls*]
I'm worn out A postscript—don't forget it.
He was a pen in the hands of others

PEER GYNT

What shall I—? What am I? Oh, Thou—keep hold!
I am what Thou wilt—a Turk, a Sinner,
A Troll, only help me! Something has burst
Within me! [*Shrieks.*]

I cannot remember Thy name—
Help me, Thou—Guardian of all madmen!
[*Sinks down in a swoon* BEGRIFFENFELDT,
holding a straw crown in his hand, leaps on
to PEER GYNT and sits astride of him]

BEGRIFFENFELDT

See how he sits enthroned in the mud!—
He's out of himself! Let us crown him now!
[*Puts the crown on PEER GYNT's head, and shouts:*
Long live the Emperor of Self!]

SCHAFMANN (*in the cage*).

Es lebe hoch der grosse Peer!

ACT V

SCENE I

(SCENE —On board a ship in the North Sea, off the coast of Norway Sunset and a threatening sky PEER GYNT, now a vigorous old man with grey hair and beard, is on the poop His clothes, which are somewhat the worse for wear, are half sailor-like, he wears a pilot-jacket and sea-boots He looks weather-beaten, and his expression has hardened The CAPTAIN is at the wheel with the HELMSMAN The crew is forward PEER GYNT is leaning his arms on the gunwale and gazing at the land)

PEER GYNT

There's Hallingskarven in winter dress;
He shows up well in the evening light.
And there's his brother Joklen behind,
Still wearing his ice-green glacier cap,
And, like a lady dressed in white,
Lies Folgefond behind them both —
Don't try any follies, my ancient friends!
Stay where you are—you are made of stone.

CAPTAIN (*calling forward*)

Two men to the wheel—and hoist the light!

PEER GYNT

It's blowing

CAPTAIN.

Aye, we'll have a storm.

PEER GYNT.

Can one see Ronde from the sea?

CAPTAIN

No—it lies hidden behind Faanen

PEER GYNT

Or Blaaho?

CAPTAIN

No, but, from aloft,
Galdhopiggen when the weather's clear

PEER GYNT.

Which way's Harteigen?

CAPTAIN (*pointing*)

Over there.

PEER GYNT

Of course.

CAPTAIN

You seem to know the country.

PEER GYNT

I passed this way when I sailed from home,
And early impressions, as they say,
Last longest

[*Spirts over the side, and continues gazing at
the coast*]

It is over there—
Where the hillside glens are blue,
In the dark and narrow valleys,
And along the open fjords—
That is where the people live

[*Looks at the* CAPTAIN.

Not many houses on this coast

CAPTAIN

No, they are few and far between.

PEER GYNT

Shall we be in by morning?

Peer Gynt

CAPTAIN

Aye,
I hope so, if the night is not
Too bad

PEER GYNT

It's gathering in the west.

CAPTAIN

It is.

PEER GYNT.

Oh, by the way, look here—
Remind me, when we're settling up,
That I intend to make a present
To the crew——

CAPTAIN

You're very good.

PEER GYNT

It will only be a small one
I made money, but I've lost it,
Fate and I have fallen out
You know what I have got on board;
Well, that's the lot The rest of it
Has taken wings and flown away

CAPTAIN

Oh, what you've got is quite enough
To win respect from folk at home

PEER GYNT

I have no folk There's no one waiting
For this rich ugly uncle.—Well,
I shall be spared some fuss at landing

CAPTAIN

The storm is brewing

PEER GYNT

Now remember,
If any of you need it badly
I'm not close-fisted with my money.

CAPTAIN

That's kind They're mostly badly off,
They all have wives and families—
Can scarcely live upon their pay—
And, if your kindness sends them home
With something extra in their pockets,
To-morrow's home-coming will never
Be forgotten

PEER GYNT

What's all that?
Do you say they've wives and children?
Married?

CAPTAIN

Yes, married—all the lot.
The poorest of them all's the Cook,
His house is never free from hunger.

PEER GYNT

Married? And someone waiting there
To greet them when they come? Is that it?

CAPTAIN

Of course, like all poor folk.

PEER GYNT

Supposing
It's evening when they come—what then?

CAPTAIN

Then I expect that something tasty
Will have been got for the occasion—

PEER GYNT.

A lamp upon the table?

CAPTAIN

Aye,
And maybe two, a dram to drink——

PEER GYNT

They'll sit at ease, in warmth and comfort,
With children round them? And such hubbub
In the room that no one hears
Half the other says to them,
Just because they are so happy?

CAPTAIN

Very likely, and that's why
It's so kind of you to promise
They shall have a little present.

PEER GYNT (*banging his fist on the gunwale*).

No, I'm damned if they shall have it!
Do you think me such a fool
As to fork out for the pleasure
Of helping other people's children?
I've worked too hard to get my money!
No one's waiting for old Peer Gynt

CAPTAIN

Just as you please, it's your own money.

PEER GYNT

Quite so. It's mine and no one else's.
Directly you have cast your anchor
I'll settle up for what I owe you
For my cabin passage hither
From Panama, and then I'll give you
Something for a dram of brandy
For the crew, but not a penny
More than that You may have leave
To knock me down if I give more!

CAPTAIN.

You'll get my receipt, and nothing else.

Now please excuse me, the storm is rising

*[He crosses the deck It has become dark, and the
cabin lamps are being lit The sea grows
rougher Fog and thick clouds gather*

PEER GYNT

Provide for a crowd of others' children—?

Fill others' hearts with happiness,

And so be always in their thoughts—?

There's no one wasting thoughts on me

Lamps on their tables? I'll put them out!

I'll find some way—! I will make them drunk,

Not one of these fellows shall go home sober

They shall go drunk to their wives and children,

They shall swear—bang loudly on the table—

Frighten their families out of their wits!

Their wives shall scream and run out of the house,

And their children too! I'll spoil their pleasure!

*[The ship rolls heavily, he stumbles, and has
difficulty in holding on*

That was a bad one! The sea's as busy

As if it were paid for what it's doing

It's the same always, up here in the north;

The sea to fight with, fierce and angry—

[Listens.

What was that cry?

THE WATCH (*forward*).

A wreck to leeward!

CAPTAIN (*amidships*)

Starboard the helm! Keep her close to the wind!

HELMSMAN.

Are there men on the wreck?

THE WATCH

I can make out three

PEER GYNT

Lower a boat—!

CAPTAIN

It would only capsize

[Goes forward]

PEER GYNT

Who thinks of that?

[To the crew]

If you're men, you'll save them!

You're surely not afraid of a wetting?

BOATSWAIN

It's impossible in such a sea as this.

PEER GYNT

They're calling again! The wind is raging —

Cook, won't you try? Come on! I'll pay you——

COOK

Not if you gave me twenty guineas.

PEER GYNT

You dogs! You cowards! Don't you know

That these are men that have wives and children

Who are waiting—?

BOATSWAIN

Patience will do them good

CAPTAIN

Keep her stern to the breakers!

HELMSMAN

The wreck's gone under

PEER GYNT

Was that sudden silence—?

BOATSWAIN

If they are married,
As you suggest, then the world's the richer
By three newly-created widows
[*The storm increases in violence* PEER GYNT goes aft

PEER GYNT.

There's no more Faith among men any longer—
No more Christianity worth the name,
There's little that's good in their words or their deeds,
And they pay no heed to the Powers Above
In a storm like to-night's, one may very well
Be afraid of God, these brutes should cower
And remember that, as the saying goes,
It's risky to play with elephants,—
And then they defy Him openly!
I'm guiltless enough, if it comes to judgment,
I can prove that I made an offer to pay them
But what do I get in return for that?
I know they say that your head lies easy
If your conscience is clear That may be true
On *terra firma*, but on the sea,
Where an honest man's quite the exception,
I don't consider it worth a rush
At sea you never can be yourself,
You simply sink or swim with the others,
Should the hour of vengeance chance to strike
For the Cook and the Boatswain, I most likely
Should be swept along to perdition with them,
There's no respect for individuals,—
You're nothing more than one of the crowd
My mistake has been that I've been too meek,
And get the blame for all that has happened
If I were younger, I do believe
I'd change my tune and play the boss
There's time for it yet! It shall get abroad
That Peer has come overseas a winner!
By hook or crook I'll get back the farm;
I'll build on it—it shall look like a castle

But not a soul shall come into my house!
They shall stand at the door and twiddle their caps,
They shall beg—I'll let them do *that* with pleasure—
But I'll not give them a single farthing,
If I've had to smart from the lash of fortune,
They'll find out that I can hit back again——

[A STRANGER is seen standing beside PEER GYNT
in the gloom, bowing politely to him]

STRANGER

Good evening!

PEER GYNT

Good evening! What—? Who are you?

STRANGER

Your fellow-passenger, at your service.

PEER GYNT

Indeed? I thought I was the only one.

STRANGER

A wrong impression, corrected now.

PEER GYNT

But it's very strange I have never seen you
Until this evening——

STRANGER

I don't go out

In daytime.

PEER GYNT

Perhaps you are not well?
You're as white as a sheet——

STRANGER

I'm quite well, thank you

PEER GYNT

What a storm!

STRANGER

Yes, what a blessing, man!

PEER GYNT.

A blessing?

STRANGER.

The waves are mountains high.
It makes one's mouth water to think
Of the wrecks that there will be to-night!—
Of the corpses that will be washed ashore.

PEER GYNT.

God forbid!

STRANGER

Have you ever seen a man
That has been strangled—or hanged—or drowned?

PEER GYNT.

What on earth do you mean?

STRANGER

There's a grin on their faces;
But the grin is ghastly, and for the most part
They've bitten their tongues

PEER GYNT

Do go away!

STRANGER.

Only one question! Suppose, for instance,
That the ship should run aground to-night
And sink——

PEER GYNT

Then do you think there's danger?

STRANGER

I really don't know what to answer.
Suppose I'm saved and you get drowned——

PEER GYNT.

Oh, bosh——!

STRANGER

Well, it's just possible.
With one foot in the grave, a man
Inclines to charitable thoughts——

PEER GYNT (*putting his hand in his pocket*).
I see, it's money that you want!

STRANGER

No, but if you would be so kind
As to present me with your corpse——?

PEER GYNT

This is too much!

STRANGER

Merely your corpse!
It's for a scientific purpose——

PEER GYNT

Get out!

STRANGER

But, my dear friend, consider——
The thing would be to your advantage!
I'd have you opened and laid bare
It really is the seat of dreaming
That I am seeking, but, besides,
I'd have you thoroughly examined——

PEER GYNT

Get out!

STRANGER

But, sir—a mere drowned corpse!

PEER GYNT

Blasphemous man! You encourage the storm!
What folly! In all this wind and rain
And heavy seas and every sign
That some fatality may happen——
Here are you asking for something worse!

STRANGER

I see that you're not disposed, for the moment,
To carry the matter farther But time
So very often will alter things [*Bows politely*
We shall meet when you're sinking, if not before,
Then, perhaps, you'll be in a better humour
[*Goes into the cabin*

PEER GYNT

Unpleasant fellows, these men of science!
Freethinkers, too——
[*To the BOATSWAIN who is passing*
A word, my friend!
Who is that lunatic passenger?

BOATSWAIN

I did not know we had any but you.

PEER GYNT

No other? Why, this gets worse and worse.
[*To a SAILOR who comes out of the cabin*
Who went into the cabin just now?

SAILOR

The ship's dog, sir! [*Passes on*

THE WATCH (*calling out*)

Land close ahead!

PEER GYNT

My trunk! My box! Bring them up on deck!

BOATSWAIN

We have something else to think about now.

PEER GYNT

Captain, I wasn't serious
In what I said! I was only joking!
Of course I'm going to help the Cook—!

CAPTAIN.

The jib has gone!

MATE.

There went the foresail!

BOATSWAIN (*calling from forward*).

Breakers ahead!

CAPTAIN.

She'll go to pieces!

[*The ship strikes Noise and confusion.*]

SCENE II

(SCENE —*Off the coast, amongst rocks and breakers The ship is sinking Through the mist, glimpses are caught of a boat with two men in it A breaking wave fills it; it capsizes, a scream is heard, then all is still for a while Soon afterwards the boat comes into sight, floating keel uppermost PEER GYNT comes to the surface near the boat*)

PEER GYNT

Help! Help! A boat!—Help! I shall sink!

God save me—as the Bible says!

[*Clings tight to the keel of the boat The COOK comes to the surface on the other side of the boat*]

COOK

Oh, God—for my dear children's sake

Be pitiful! Let me be saved!

[*Holds on to the keel.*]

PEER GYNT.

Let go!

COOK.

Let go!

PEER GYNT

I'll push you off!

COOK

I'll push *you* off!

PEER GYNT.

I'll kick you off!

Let go your hold! It won't bear two!

COOK

I know. Get off!

PEER GYNT

Get off yourself!

COOK

Not likely!

*[They fight The COOK gets one hand hurt, but
clings fast to the boat with the other hand]*

PEER GYNT

Take your hand away!

COOK

Be kind! Be merciful!—Just think
Of my young children there at home!

PEER GYNT.

I have more need to live than you,
For I have got no children yet.

COOK

Let go! You've had your life, I'm young!

PEER GYNT

Be quick and sink, you're much too heavy.

COOK

Have mercy! For God's sake let go!
There's no one that will mourn for you——
[Shrieks and slips down]
I'm drowning!

PEER GYNT (*catching hold of the COOK's hair*)

No, I've got you tight
By your back hair, repeat "Our Father"!

COOK

I can't remember—all seems dark——

PEER GYNT

Say what is most essential! Quick!

COOK

"Give us this day"——

PEER GYNT

Oh, skip all that,
You have got all that you will need

COOK

"Give us this day"——

PEER GYNT

The same old song!
It's easy seen you were a cook——
[His grip gives way.]

COOK (*sinking*).

"Give us this day our"—— *[Goes under]*

PEER GYNT

Amen, lad!
You were yourself up to the end
[Swings himself up on to the keel of the boat.]
Where there is life there's always hope——
[The STRANGER is seen in the water, catching hold of the boat]

STRANGER

Good morning!

PEER GYNT.

Eh!

STRANGER

I heard a cry,
It's funny I should find you here
Well? Do you see I spoke the truth?

PEER GYNT

Let go! There's barely room for one!

STRANGER

I'll swim quite well with my left leg.
I'll float if only I insert
My finger-tip into this crack
But what about your corpse?

PEER GYNT

Be quiet!

STRANGER

The rest is absolutely done for——

PEER GYNT

Do hold your tongue!

STRANGER

Just as you wish

[*Silence*]

PEER GYNT

Well?

STRANGER

I am silent

PEER GYNT

Devil's tricks!—

What are you doing?

STRANGER

I am waiting.

PEER GYNT (*tearing his hair*).

I shall go mad! What are you?

STRANGER (*nodding to him*)

Friendly!

PEER GYNT.

Go on! What more?

STRANGER

What do you think?

Don't you know anyone that's like me?

PEER GYNT

I know the Devil——

STRANGER (*lowering his voice*).

Is he wont

To light us on the darkest paths
Of life when we're beset by fear?

PEER GYNT

Oh! So it seems, on explanation,
That you're a messenger of the light?

STRANGER

Friend, have you known—say, twice a year—
What terror really means?

PEER GYNT

Of course.

One is afraid when danger threatens;
But your words are ambiguous——

STRANGER.

Well, have you ever, even once,
Triumphed as the result of terror?

PEER GYNT (*looking at him*)

If you have come to guide my steps,
'Twas stupid not to come before
It's not much good to choose the time
When I'm most likely to be drowned.

STRANGER

And would your triumph be more likely
If you sat snugly by your fire?

PEER GYNT

Perhaps not, but your talk was foolish
How could you think it would affect me?

STRANGER

Where I come from, they think a smile
Worth quite as much as any pathos.

PEER GYNT.

There is a time for everything
Things which a publican may do
Are most disgraceful in a bishop.

STRANGER

The souls of those of bygone days
Whose ashes rest in funeral urns
Aren't always in a solemn humour

PEER GYNT.

Leave me, you bugbear! Get away!
I won't die! I must get to land!

STRANGER

As far as that goes, make your mind
Quite easy, no one ever dies
Until he's seen the fifth act through
[Disappears.]

PEER GYNT

Ah, it slipped out of him at last,—
He was a wretched Moralist

SCENE III

(SCENE — *A churchyard high up in the mountains A funeral is going on The PRIEST and the MOURNERS are just finishing the last verse of a hymn PEER GYNT is passing on the road, and stops at the churchyard gate*)

PEER GYNT

Here's another man going the way of all flesh
Well, God be praised that it isn't me!

[Goes into the churchyard]

PRIEST

Now that his soul has gone to meet its God,
And this poor dust waits like an empty husk,—
Let us, dear friends, in a few words recall
The dead man's journey on this earth of ours

He wasn't rich, nor was he very clever,
His voice was weak, his bearing scarcely manly;
He had no strength of mind, nor much decision,
Nor in his own home did he seem the master
His manner when he came to church was such
As if he felt he must request permission
To take his seat among the congregation

Of Gudbrandsdal he was, you know, a native,
And he was scarce a boy when he came hither,
And, to the last, as you no doubt have noticed,
He always kept his right hand in his pocket

That same peculiarity I mention
Was probably the only thing that stamped
His picture on our minds, that, and the shyness—
The almost shamefaced diffidence—with which
He bore himself when he came in amongst us.

But, though he was so diffident and quiet,
And to the last was almost like a stranger,
You know quite well, in spite of his concealment,
The hand he hid had no more than four fingers —

I well remember, many years ago,
During the war, one morning a Conscription
Was held at Lunde Everyone was full
Of Norway's troubles and her doubtful future.
Behind a table, I remember, sat
A Captain and the Mayor, and several Sergeants,
And one by one our lads came in, were measured,
Enrolled, and duly sworn in to the army
The room was full, and outside in the courtyard
Was heard the noise of the young people's laughter.

A name was called out, and a lad came in
With face as white as snow upon the hilltops
They told him to come forward to the table
His right hand was all swathed up in a napkin,

He gasped and swallowed—tried to find his voice—
But seemed as if he had no words to answer
The Captain's questions Still, at last, he did,
And then, with crimson face and faltering tongue
That sometimes let the words out with a rush,
He mumbled some tale of an accident—
A reaping-hook that slipped and cut his finger
Clean off his hand There was a sudden silence.
Men exchanged glances, lips were curled in scorn,
Looks of disdain were flashed upon the lad,
Who stood there staring with unseeing eyes,
He felt their scorn although he did not see it
And then the Captain, an old grey-haired man,
Stood up, and spat, and pointed to the door
And said "Begone!"—and so the lad went out.
Those in the room divided to make way,
So that he ran the gauntlet of them all
He reached the door, and then took to his heels,
Ran up the hillside—through the woods and pastures,
Up over rocks and stones, stumbling and slipping—
To where his home was, far up in the mountains
'Twas six months after that when he came hither,
Bringing his mother, children and betrothed
He leased some land upon the mountain-side
Near to where Lomb is bounded by the moor.
As soon as it was possible, he married
The mother of his children, built a house,
Broke up the stony ground with such success
That yellow grain in patches soon appeared
Amidst the rocks It's true that when he went
To church he kept his right hand in his pocket,
But on his farm I know he worked as well
With nine fingers as others with their ten —
Then, one wet spring, a flood swept all away
They saved their lives, but nothing else, and, poor
And naked as he was, he set to work
To clear the soil afresh, and by the autumn
He'd built himself a house on safer ground
Safer? Yes, from the flood but not the mountains.
For, two years later, in an avalanche

All that he had was overwhelmed again.
But even avalanches had no power
To daunt his soul He set to work to dig
And clear the snow and save what might be left,
And, ere the winter's snow had come again,
He'd built his little house a third time up

Three sons he had—three fine young lads—and they
Must go to school, and school was far away,
And so, from where the public roadway ended,
He had to cut a steep and narrow path
Through the hard snow And then—what did he do?
The eldest boy had to climb up and scramble
As best he could, and where it was too steep
His father roped him to him for support
The other two he carried in his arms
And on his back

And thus, year after year,
He drudged; and his three sons grew to be men.
Then came a time when he might surely ask
For something in return from them, but they,
Three prosperous men in far America,
Had quite forgotten their Norwegian father
And how he used to help them to the school.

He was a man whose vision never saw
Farther than what lay nearest to his hand.
Words which resound in other people's hearts
Were meaningless to him as tinkling bells,
Family, Country—all that's best and brightest—
Was blurred and hidden by a veil of tears

But never did I know a man so humble
From that Conscription Day he carried with him
The sense of guilt, which showed as plainly on him
As did the blush of shame upon his cheek
And his four fingers hidden in his pocket
A breaker of his country's laws? Perhaps!
But there is something that outshines the law
As certainly as Gittertinde's peaks
Stand gleaming in the sun above the clouds.
He was a bad citizen, no doubt,
For Church and State alike, a sterile tree,

But up there on the rocky mountain side,
In the small circle of his hearth and home,
Where his work lay, *there* I say he was great,
Because he was himself 'Twas only there
The metal he was made of could ring true
His life was like a melody that's played
On muted strings — And therefore, peace be with
you,

Poor silent warrior, who fought and fell
Waging the little war of peasant's life!

We will not seek to search the heart and reins,
That's not a task for us, but for his Maker
Still, this I hope—and hope with confidence
That this man, as he stands before the Throne,
Is not a cripple in the eyes of God!

[*The congregation disperses* PEER GYNT *remains alone*]

PEER GYNT

Well, *that's* what I call Christianity!
Nothing in it to make one feel uneasy
Indeed the theme of the Priest's address—
That we should all strive to be ourselves—
Is really extremely edifying [Looks into the grave.
Was it he, I wonder, who slashed his knuckles
When I was felling trees in the forest?
Who knows? If I were not standing here
By the grave of this congenial spirit,
I might believe that it was myself
That was sleeping there and was listening
In dreams to praises that I deserved
It's really a beautiful Christian practice
To take a kindly retrospect
Of the whole life of the departed
I'd readily accept a verdict
From this most worthy priest —However,
I've still some time left, I expect,
Before the sexton comes and claims me,
And, as the Scripture says "The best
Is still the best", and, in like manner.

"Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof";
 And, further "Do not borrow trouble."—
 The Church is the only comforter
 Up till now I have never given
 The credit to it that is its due,
 But now I know what good it does you
 To hear authority proclaim
 "As you have sowed, so must you reap"
 We must be ourselves, in everything,
 Both great and small, we must look after
 Ourselves and what concerns ourselves
 Though Fortune fail us we shall win
 Respect, if our careers have been
 Shaped in accordance with this doctrine —
 And now for home! What though the way
 Be steep and narrow—what though Fortune
 Be still malicious—old Peer Gynt
 Will go his own way, and remain,
 As always poor but virtuous [Goes

SCENE IV

(SCENE.—A hillside showing the dried-up bed of a stream, by which stands a ruined mill. The ground is torn up, and everything is in a ruinous state. Outside the mill an auction is taking place, there is a large and noisy gathering of people, and drinking is going on. PEER GYNT is sitting on a heap of rubbish near the mill.)

PEER GYNT.

Backward or forward, it's just as far,
 Out or in, the way's as narrow
 Time destroys and the stream cuts through
 "Round about," said the Boyg, and we needs must,
 here

A MAN IN MOURNING¹

Now there's nothing left but the rubbish
 [Looks at PEER GYNT.
 Strangers, too? God save you, sir!]

PEER GYNT

Well met! This is a merry scene,
 Is it a christening, or a wedding?

MAN IN MOURNING

I should rather say a house-warming,
 The bride, poor thing, is food for worms.

PEER GYNT

And worms are fighting for rags and scraps.

MAN IN MOURNING

It's a finished story, and this is the end

PEER GYNT

Every story ends the same,
 I've known them all since I was a boy.

A YOUNG BOY (*holding a casting-ladle*).
 Look what a fine thing I have bought!
 Peer Gynt used to mould buttons with this.

ANOTHER

I got a fine purse for a farthing!

A THIRD

A pedlar's pack for twopence halfpenny!

PEER GYNT

Peer Gynt? Who was he?

MAN IN MOURNING

I only know
 He was brother-in-law to the bridegroom, Death,
 And also to the blacksmith Aslak

¹ The Man in Mourning is Aslak, who apparently has married Ingrid and is now in mourning for her death

A MAN IN GREY¹

You're forgetting me, you must be drunk!

MAN IN MOURNING

You're forgetting the loft-door at Hægstad.

MAN IN GREY

So I was, but you were never dainty.

MAN IN MOURNING

If only she doesn't play Death a trick——

MAN IN GREY

Come on! Have a drink with your relation!

MAN IN MOURNING

Relation be damned! Your drunken fancies——

MAN IN GREY

Oh, nonsense! Blood is thicker than that,
At least we're both Peer Gynt's relations*[They go off together]*PEER GYNT (*aside*)

I'm meeting old friends

A BOY (*calling after the MAN IN MOURNING*)My poor dead mother
Will come after you, Aslak, if you get drinkingPEER GYNT (*getting up*)The Agriculturalists are wrong,
It doesn't smell better the deeper you dig.A BOY (*with a bearskin*)Here's the Dovre-Cat!—or at least his skin!
It was he chased the Troll on Christmas Eve.ANOTHER (*with a pair of reindeer-horns*).Here's the fine buck on which Peer Gynt
Rode right along the ridge of Gendin¹ The Man in Grey is Mads Moen.

A THIRD

(*with a hammer, calls to the MAN IN MOURNING*)

Hi! Aslak! Do you know this hammer?

Was it this you used when the Devil escaped?

A FOURTH (*showing his empty hands*)

Mads Moen, here's the invisible cloak

In which Peer Gynt and Ingrid vanished.

PEER GYNT

Some brandy, boys! I'm feeling old,

I'll hold an auction of all my rubbish

A BOY

What have you got to sell?

PEER GYNT

A castle;

It's up at Ronde, and solidly built.

BOY

I bid one button!

PEER GYNT

A drink with it, then,

It's a sin and a shame to offer less.

ANOTHER BOY

He's a merry old chap!

[*The crowd gathers round* PEER GYNT

PEER GYNT

Grane, my horse!—

Who bids?

ONE OF THE CROWD.

Where is he?

PEER GYNT

Away in the West!

Near the sunset, boys! He can trot as fast

As Peer Gynt could make up his lies

VOICES

What more have you?

PEER GYNT

Both gold and rubbish!

I bought them at a loss, and now

I'll sell them at a sacrifice

A BOY.

Put them up!

PEER GYNT

A vision of a prayer-book!

You may have it for a hook and eye

BOY

Deuce take your visions!

PEER GYNT

Then—my Empire!

I throw it to you, you may scramble for it!

BOY

Does a crown go with it?

PEER GYNT

A lovely crown

Of straw, and it will fit the first

That puts it on —Here's something more!

An empty egg! Grey hair of a madman!

The Prophet's beard!—You may have them all,

If you'll only show me on the hillside

A signpost marked. "This is the way"!

THE MAYOR (*who has come up*).

The way you're going on, my man,

I think will lead you to the lock-up

PEER GYNT (*with his hat in his hand*)

'Very likely. But, tell me, who was Peer Gynt?

THE MAYOR

Oh, bother—!

PEER GYNT

Excuse me—I want to know—!

THE MAYOR

Well,—they say, an incurable romancer.

PEER GYNT

Romancer?

THE MAYOR

Yes, romanced about
All sorts of glorious deeds as if
He had done all of them himself
Excuse me now, my friend, I'm busy——
[*Goes away*]

PEER GYNT

And where's this wonderful fellow now?

AN ELDERLY MAN

He went oversea to a foreign land,
And came to grief as one might have expected.
It's many years now since he was hanged.

PEER GYNT

Hanged? Dear me! I was sure of it,
The late Peer Gynt was himself to the last
Good-bye I'm much obliged to you all! [Bows
[*Takes a few steps, then stops*]
You merry boys and lovely women,
May I tell you a story in return?

VOICES.

Yes, if you know one!

PEER GYNT

Certainly

[Comes back to them His face takes on an
altered expression

I was in San Francisco, gold-digging,
And the whole town was full of freaks;
One played the fiddle with his toes,
One danced fandangos on his knees,
A third, I heard, kept making verses
While holes were bored right through his skull
To this freak-show the Devil came,
To try his luck like so many others.
His line was this he could imitate
The grunting of a pig exactly
His personality attracted
Although he was not recognized
The house was full, and on tenterhooks
Of expectation In he strode,
Dressed in a cape with flowing wings,
Man muss sich drappieren, as the Germans say.
But no one knew that in his cape
He had a little pig concealed
And now he started his performance
The devil pinched, the pig gave tongue.
The whole was a fantasia
On a pig's life, from birth to slaughter,
Ending up with a shriek like that
Which follows on the slaughterer's stroke;
With which, the artist bowed and went —
Then there arose a keen discussion
Among the experts in the audience
The noises were both praised and censured;
Some found the tone of them too thin,
Others declared the dying shriek
Was far too studied, but they all
Were of the same mind on one point:
That the performance was, *qua* grunt,
Exceedingly exaggerated
You see, that's what the Devil got,

Because he'd made the sad mistake
Of reckoning without his public
[*Bows and goes away An uneasy silence falls
on the crowd*]

SCENE V

(SCENE — *A clearing in a great forest, on the Eve of Pentecost In the background is seen a hut, with a pair of reindeer-horns over the door PEER GYNT is on all-fours on the ground, grubbing up wild onions*)

PEER GYNT

This is one standpoint Where is the next?
One should try all things and choose the best.
I have done that, I've been a Cæsar,
And now I'm behaving like Nebuchadnezzar.
So I might go through Bible history
This old boy's back to mother earth
I remember the Book says "Dust thou art"
The great thing in life is to fill your belly.
Fill it with onions? It matters little,
I'll fit some cunning traps and snares.
There is a brook, I'll not go thirsty,
And all wild things shall do my bidding
And, suppose I die—which perhaps may happen—
I'll creep beneath a fallen tree,
Like the bear, I'll cover myself with leaves,
And scratch in the bark, in great big letters:
"Here lies Peer Gynt, a decent chap,
Who was Emperor of all the Beasts"—
Emperor? [Laughs to himself]

You absurd old humbug!
You're not an emperor, you're an onion!
Now, my dear Peer, I'm going to peel you,
However little you may enjoy it

[Takes an onion and peels it, layer by layer]
There's the untidy outer husk,
That's the shipwrecked man on the wreck of the boat,
Next layer's the Passenger, thin and skanky—

Still smacking of Peer Gynt a little
 Next we come to the gold-digger self,
 The pith of it's gone—someone's seen to that.
 This layer with a hardened edge
 Is the fur-hunter of Hudson's Bay
 The next one's like a crown No, thank you!
 We'll throw it away without further question.
 Here's the Antiquarian, short and sturdy,
 And here is the Prophet, fresh and juicy,
 He stinks, as the saying goes, of lies
 Enough to bring water to your eyes.
 This layer, effeminately curled,
 Is the man who lived a life of pleasure
 The next looks sickly It's streaked with black.
 Black may mean missionaries or negroes

[Pulls off several layers together]

There's a most surprising lot of layers!
 Are we never coming to the kernel?

[Pulls all that is left to pieces]

There isn't one! To the innermost bit
 It's nothing but layers, smaller and smaller
 Nature's a joker! *[Throws the bits away from him]*
 Deuce take all thinking!

If you begin that, you may miss your footing
 Well, anyway I don't run that risk
 As long as I'm down on all-fours here

[Scratches the back of his head]

Life's an uncommonly odd contraption,
 It plays an underhand game with us,
 If you try to catch hold of it, it eludes you,
 And you get what you didn't expect—or nothing
[Goes closer to the hut, looks at it, and starts.]
 That hut? In the forest—! Eh? *[Rubs his eyes.]*

I'm certain

I must have seen that hut before
 The reindeer-horns there, over the door—!
 A mermaid carved on the end of the gable—!
 That's a lie! No mermaid—just logs and nails—
 And the bolt that should keep out plaguy thoughts—!
[SOLVEIG'S voice is heard from the hut]

SOLVEIG (*singing*)

Now all is ready for Pentecost
Dear lad far away, are you coming near?
If your burden's heavy, then rest awhile,
I shall wait, because I promised you, dear
[PEER GYNT *risés to his feet, deathly pale and quiet*

PEER GYNT

One who remembered—and one who forgot,
One who has kept what the other has lost
Life's serious, not a foolish jest!
Ah, misery! *Here my Empire lay!*
[*Runs into the wood*

SCENE VI

(SCENE —*A moor with firs, at night A forest fire has laid it waste Charred tree-trunks for miles around Patches of white mist are lying here and there over the ground* PEER GYNT *comes running over the moor*)

PEER GYNT

Ashes, mists and dust-clouds flying—
Fine material to build with!
Stench and rottenness within them,
All a whited sepulchre
Fancies, dreams and still-born wisdom
For a base, while lies shall serve
For a staircase for the building
Of a lofty pyramid
Flight from everything that's worthy,
No repentance—only terror,
These shall cap a building labelled
"Petrus Gyntus Cæsar fecit!" [Listens
What is that sound like children's weeping?—
Weeping that is half a song?
What are these that I see rolling
At my feet, like balls of thread?
[Kicks his feet about
Get away! You block the path up!

THE THREADBALLS ¹ (*on the ground*).

We are thoughts,
You should have thought us,
Little feet, to life
You should have brought us!

PEER GYNT (*going round them*)
I've only brought *one* thought to life,—
And it was wry and bandy-legged!

THE THREADBALLS.
We should have risen
With glorious sound,
But here like threadballs
We are earth-bound

PEER GYNT (*stumbling*)
Threadballs! You infernal rascals!
Are you tripping up your father? [*Runs away*]

WITHERED LEAVES (*flying before the wind*)
We are a watchword,
You should have used us!
Life, by your sloth,
Has been refused us
By worms we're eaten
All up and down,
No fruit will have us
For spreading crown

PEER GYNT
Still, you have not been born for nothing,
Lie still, and you will serve for manure

A SIGHING IN THE AIR
We are songs,
You should have sung us!
In the depths of your heart

¹ The idea of Trolls incorporated in threadballs is frequently met with in Scandinavian folklore

Despair has wrung us!
We lay and waited,
You called us not
May your throat and voice
With poison rot!

PEER GYNT

Poison yourselves, you silly doggerel!
Had I any time for verse and twaddle?
[*Goes to one side.*]

DEWDROPS (*dropping from the branches*)

We are tears
Which were never shed.
The cutting ice
Which all hearts dread
We could have melted;
But now its dart
Is frozen into
A stubborn heart
The wound is closed;
Our power is lost

PEER GYNT

Thanks!—I wept at Rondesvalen,
And got a thrashing on the backside!

BROKEN STRAWS

We are deeds
You have left undone,
Strangled by doubt,
Spoiled ere begun
At the Judgment Day
We shall be there
To tell our tale,
How will you fare?

PEER GYNT.

Rubbish! You can't condemn a man
For actions that he *hasn't* done!

AASE'S VOICE (*from afar off*).

Fie, what a driver!
 Ugh! You've upset me
 Into a snowdrift,
 Muddied and wet me
 Peer, where's the Castle?
 You've driven madly,
 The whip in your hand
 The Devil's used badly!

PEER GYNT

I'd best be off while I am able.
 If I have to bear the burden
 Of the Devil's sins, I'll sink
 Into the ground I find my own
 Quite a heavy enough load [Runs off]

SCENE VII

(SCENE —*Another part of the moor*)

PEER GYNT (*singing*)

A sexton! a sexton! Where are you all?
 Open your bleating mouths and sing!
 We've bands of crape tied round our hats,
 And plenty of corpses for burying!

[*The BUTTON MOULDER, carrying his box of tools and a big casting-ladle, comes in by a side path*

BUTTON MOULDER.

Well met, gaffer!

PEER GYNT

Good evening, my friend!

BUTTON MOULDER

You seem in a hurry Where are you going?

PEER GYNT

To a funeral

BUTTON MOULDER

Really? My sight's not good—

Excuse me—is your name by any chance Peer?

PEER GYNT

Peer Gynt's my name

BUTTON MOULDER

What a piece of luck!

It was just Peer Gynt I was looking for.

PEER GYNT

Were you? What for?

BUTTON MOULDER

Well, as you see,

I am a button moulder, and you
Must be popped into my Casting-ladle

PEER GYNT

What for?

BUTTON MOULDER

So as to be melted down

PEER GYNT

Melted?

BUTTON MOULDER

Yes, it's clean and it's empty.

Your grave is dug and your coffin ordered,
Your body will make fine food for worms,
But the Master's orders bid me fetch
Your soul at once

PEER GYNT

Impossible!

Like this?—without the slightest warning?

BUTTON MOULDER

Alike for funerals and confinements
The custom is to choose the day
Without giving the slightest warning
To the chief guest of the occasion

PEER GYNT

Quite so My head is going round!
You are—?

BUTTON MOULDER

You heard, a button moulder.

PEER GYNT

I understand! A favourite child
Is called by lots of names —Well, Peer,
So *that's* to be the end of your journey!—
Still, it's a scurvy trick to play me
I deserved something a little kinder
I'm not so bad as perhaps you think,
I've done some little good in the world.
At worst I might be called a bungler,
But certainly not an out-and-out sinner.

BUTTON MOULDER

But that is just the point, my man
In the highest sense you're not a sinner;
So you escape the pangs of torment
And come into the Casting-ladle

PEER GYNT

Oh, call it what you like—a ladle
Or the bottomless pit—it's just the same!
Ginger is always hot in the mouth,
Whatever you may be pleased to call it
Satan, away!

BUTTON MOULDER

You are not so rude
As to think that I've a cloven hoof?

PEER GYNT.

Cloven hoof or fox's claws—
Whichever you like So now pack off!
Mind your own business, and be off!

BUTTON MOULDER

My friend, you're under a great delusion.
We're both in a hurry, so, to save time,
I'll try to explain the matter to you.
You are, as you yourself have said,
Nothing great in the way of a sinner—
Scarcely a middling one, perhaps——

PEER GYNT

Now you are talking reasonably.

BUTTON MOULDER

Wait a bit!—I think it would be going
Too far to call you virtuous——

PEER GYNT

I certainly don't lay claim to that.

BUTTON MOULDER

Well, then, say, something betwixt and between.
Sinners in the true grand style
Are seldom met with nowadays,
That style of sin needs power of mind—
It's something more than dabbling in mud.

PEER GYNT.

That's perfectly true, one should go at it
With something of a Berserk's fury

BUTTON MOULDER

You, on the contrary, my friend,
Took sinning lightly

PEER GYNT

Just, my friend,
A little mud-splashed, so to speak

BUTTON MOULDER

Now we're agreed The bottomless pit
Is not for you who played with mud

PEER GYNT

Consequently, my friend, I take it
That I may have your leave to go
Just as I came?

BUTTON MOULDER

Oh no, my friend—
Consequently you'll be melted down

PEER GYNT

What's this new game that you've invented
While I have been abroad?

BUTTON MOULDER

The practice
Is just as old as the Creation,
And was invented for the purpose
Of keeping things up to the standard.
You know in metal work, for instance,
It sometimes happens that a casting
Turns out a failure, absolutely—
Buttons are turned out without loops.
What would you do in such a case?

PEER GYNT

I'd throw the trash away

BUTTON MOULDER

Exactly.
Your father had the reputation
Of reckless wastefulness as long
As he had anything to waste
The Master, on the other hand,
Is economical, you see,
And therefore is a man of substance.
He never throws away as useless

A single thing that may be dealt with
As raw material —Now, *you*
Were meant to be a gleaming button
On the World's waistcoat, but your loop
Was missing, so you've got to go
Into the scrap-heap, to be merged
Into the mass.

PEER GYNT.

But do you mean
That I've got to be melted down
With any Tom and Dick and Harry
And moulded fresh?

BUTTON MOULDER

That's what I mean
That's what we've done to not a few,
It's what they do at the mint with money
When the coin is too much worn with use.

PEER GYNT

But it's simply disgusting niggardliness!
My dear friend, won't you let me go?
A loopless button—a smooth-worn coin—
What are they to a man of your master's substance?

BUTTON MOULDER

The fact of your having a soul's enough
To give you a certain intrinsic value.

PEER GYNT

No, I say! No! With tooth and nail
I'll fight against it! I'd rather, far,
Put up with anything than that!

BUTTON MOULDER.

But what do you mean by "anything"?
You must be reasonable, you know,
You're not the sort that goes to Heaven——

PEER GYNT

I'm humble; I don't aim so high
 As that, but I'm not going to lose
 A single jot of what's myself
 Let me be sentenced in ancient fashion;
 Send me to Him with the Cloven Hoof
 For a certain time—say, a hundred years,
 If the sentence must be a very severe one
 That's a thing I daresay one might put up with,
 The torture would then be only moral,
 And perhaps, after all, not so very tremendous.
 It would be a transition, so to speak,
 As the fox said ¹ If you wait, there comes
 Deliverance and you may get back,
 Meanwhile you hope for better days
 But the other idea—to be swallowed up
 Like a speck in a mass of strange material—
 This ladle business—losing all
 The attributes that make a Gynt—
That fills my inmost soul with horror!

BUTTON MOULDER.

But, my dear Peer, there is no need
 For you to make so great a fuss
 About so small a thing, because
 You never yet have been yourself.
 What difference can it make to you
 If, when you die, you disappear?

PEER GYNT

I've never been myself! Haha!
 You almost make me laugh Peer Gynt
 Anything but himself!—No, no,
 Friend Button Moulder, you are wrong,
 You're judging blindly If you searched
 My inmost being, you would find
 I'm Peer right through, and nothing else

¹ "As the fox said when they skinned him" A Norwegian proverb

BUTTON MOULDER

Impossible Here are my orders
See, they say " You will fetch Peer Gynt.
He has defied his destiny
He is a failure, and must go
Straight into the Casting-ladle."

PEER GYNT

What nonsense! It must surely mean
Some other Gynt Are you quite sure
That it says Peer?—not John, or Rasmus?

BUTTON MOULDER

I melted them down long ago
Now, come along and don't waste time.

PEER GYNT

No, that I won't! Suppose to-morrow
You found that it meant someone else?
That would be pleasant! My good man,
You must be careful, and remember
What a responsibility——

BUTTON MOULDER

I've got my orders to protect me.

PEER GYNT

Give me a little respite, then!

BUTTON MOULDER.

What for?

PEER GYNT

I will find means to prove
That, all my life, I've been myself,
That is, of course, the point at issue.

BUTTON MOULDER

Prove it? But how?

Peer Gynt

PEER GYNT

With witnesses

And testimonials

BUTTON MOULDER.

I fear

That you won't satisfy the Master.

PEER GYNT

I'm quite sure that I shall! Besides,
 We'll talk about that when the time comes.
 Dear man, just let me have myself
 On loan for quite a little while
 I will come back to you We men
 Are not born more than once, you know,
 And naturally we make a fight
 To keep the self with which we came
 Into the world —Are we agreed?

BUTTON MOULDER.

So be it But, remember this—
 At the next crossroads we shall meet

[PEER GYNT *runs off*]

SCENE VIII

(SCENE.—*Another part of the moor*)PEER GYNT (*running in*)

Time is money, as people say.
 If I only knew where the crossroads are—
 It may be near, or it may be far
 The ground seems to burn my feet like fire
 A witness! A witness! Where shall I find one?
 It's next to impossible, here in the forest.
 The world's a bungle! It's managed wrong,

If it's necessary for a man to prove
His rights that are clear as the noonday sun!
[*A bent OLD MAN, with a staff in his hand and a
bag on his back, hobbles up to PEER GYNT*

OLD MAN

Kind sir, give a homeless old man a penny!

PEER GYNT

I'm sorry—I have no change about me——

OLD MAN

Prince Peer! Can it be that we meet at last?

PEER GYNT.

Why, who—?

OLD MAN

He's forgotten the old man at Ronde!

PEER GYNT

You surely are never—?

OLD MAN.

The King of the Dovrè

PEER GYNT

The Troll King? Really? The Troll King?—Answer!

OLD MAN

I'm he, but in different circumstances.

PEER GYNT

Ruined?

OLD MAN

Aye, robbed of everything;
A tramp, and as hungry as a wolf.

PEER GYNT.

Hurrah! Such witnesses as this
Don't grow on every tree!

OLD MAN

Your Highness
Has grown grey too since last we met

PEER GYNT

Worry and age, dear father-in-law
Well, let's forget our private affairs,
And, above all, our family squabbles.
I was a foolish youth——

OLD MAN

Yes, yes,
You were young, and youth must have its fling
And it's lucky for you that you jilted your bride,
You've escaped a lot of shame and bother,
For afterwards she went clean to the bad——

PEER GYNT

Dear me!

OLD MAN

Now she may look after herself
Just think—she and Trond have gone off together.

PEER GYNT

What Trond?

OLD MAN.

Of the Valfjeld

PEER GYNT

He? Aha,
I robbed him of the cowherd girls

OLD MAN.

But my grandson's grown a fine big fellow
And has bouncing babies all over the country.

PEER GYNT

Now, my dear man, I must cut you short,
I am full of quite a different matter.—

I'm in rather a difficult position,
And have to get a certificate
Or a testimonial from someone,
And I think you'll be the very person.
I can always raise the wind enough
To stand you a drink——

OLD MAN

Oh! Can I really
Be of assistance to Your Highness?
Perhaps, if that is so, you'll give me
A character in return?

PEER GYNT

With pleasure.
I'm a little short of ready money
And have to be careful in every way —
Now, listen to me Of course you remember
How I came that night to woo your daughter——

OLD MAN

Of course, Your Highness!

PEER GYNT

Oh, drop the title!
Well, you wanted to do me violence—
To spoil my sight by cutting my eyeball,
And turn Peer Gynt into a Troll
What did I do? I strongly objected,
Swore I would stand on my own feet;
Gave up my love, and power and honours,
Simply and solely to be myself
I want you to swear to that in court——

OLD MAN.

I can't do that!

PEER GYNT

What's that you're saying?

OLD MAN

You'll surely not force me to swear a lie?
Remember that you put on Troll breeches,
And tasted our mead——

PEER GYNT

Yes, you tempted me,
But I resolutely made up my mind
That I would not give in And *that's* the way
A man shows what he's worth A song
Depends on its concluding verse.

OLD MAN

But the conclusion, Peer, was just
The opposite of what you think

PEER GYNT.

What do you mean?

OLD MAN

You took away
My motto graven on your heart.

PEER GYNT

What motto?

OLD MAN

That compelling word——

PEER GYNT.

Word——?

OLD MAN.

——that distinguishes a Troll
From Mankind "Troll, to thyself be——
Enough!"

PEER GYNT (*with a shriek*).
Enough!

OLD MAN

And, ever since,
With all the energy you have,
You've lived according to that motto.

PEER GYNT

I? I? Peer Gynt?

OLD MAN (*weeping*)

You're most ungrateful
You've lived like a Troll, but have kept it secret
The word I taught has enabled you
To move in the world like a well-to-do man,
And now you begin abusing me
And the word to which you owe gratitude

PEER GYNT

Enough!—A mere Troll! An egoist!
It must be nonsense—it can't be true!

OLD MAN (*producing a bundle of newspapers*)

Don't you suppose that we have our papers?
Wait; I will show you in black and white
How the *Bloksberg Post* has sung your praises;
The *Heklefjeld News* has done the same
Ever since the winter you went abroad.
Will you read them, Peer? I'll be pleased to let you
Here's an article signed "Stallion's Hoof"
Here's one "On the National Spirit of Trollldom",
The writer shows how true it is
That it doesn't depend upon horns or tails,
But on having the spirit of Trollhood in one
"Our 'Enough,'" he concludes, "is what gives the
stamp
Of Troll to Man", and he mentions you
As a striking instance

PEER GYNT

I—a Troll?

Peer Gynt

OLD MAN.

It seems quite clear

PEER GYNT

Then I might have stayed
Where I was, and lived in peace and comfort
At Ronde! I might have saved shoe leather,
And spared myself much toil and trouble!
Peer Gynt—a Troll! It's a pack of lies!
Good-bye! Here's a penny to buy tobacco.

OLD MAN

But, dear Prince Peer—!

PEER GYNT

Oh, drop this nonsense!
You're mad, or else you're in your dotage.
Go to a hospital.

OLD MAN

Aye, it's that
I'm looking for But, as I told you,
My grandson's very influential
In all this part, and tells the people
I don't exist except in legends
The saying goes that one's relations
Are always the worst, and now, alas,
I feel the truth of it It's sad
To be looked on as being merely
A legendary personage——

PEER GYNT

Dear man, you're not the only one
To suffer that mishap

OLD MAN

And then,
We Trolls have nothing in the way

Of Charities or Savings Banks
Or Alms-boxes, such institutions
Would never be acceptable
At Ronde

PEER GYNT

No, and there you see
The work of your confounded motto—
Your fine "To thyself be *enough*"!

OLD MAN

Your Highness has no need to grumble.
And if, in some way or another—?

PEER GYNT

You're on the wrong scent altogether;
I'm at the end of my resources

OLD MAN

Impossible! Your Highness ruined?

PEER GYNT

Cleared out Even my princely self
Is now in pawn And that's your fault,
You cursed Trolls! It only shows
What comes of evil company.

OLD MAN

So there's another of my hopes
Destroyed!—Good-bye! I'd better try
And beg my way down to the town——

PEER GYNT

And when you're there, what will you do?

OLD MAN

I'll try and go upon the stage
They're advertising for National Types
In the papers.

Peer Gynt

PEER GYNT

Well, good luck to you!—
 And give my kind regards to them!
 If I can only free myself,
 I'll go the same way too I'll write
 A farce that shall be both profound
 And entertaining, and its title
 Shall be "Sic Transit Gloria Mundi"

[*Runs off along the path, leaving the OLD
 MAN calling after him*]

SCENE IX

(SCENE —*At crossroads*)

PEER GYNT

This is the tightest corner, Peer,
 You've ever been in The Trolls' "Enough"
 Has done for you Your ship's a wreck,
 You must cling to the wreckage—anything—
 To avoid the general rubbish heap

BUTTON MOULDER (*at the parting of the ways*).
 Well, Peer Gynt? And your witnesses?

PEER GYNT

What, crossroads here? This is quick work.

BUTTON MOULDER

I can read your face as easily
 As I can a book, and know your thoughts

PEER GYNT

I'm tired from running—one goes astray——

BUTTON MOULDER

Yes, and, besides, what does it lead to?

PEER GYNT

True enough, in the woods, in this failing light——

BUTTON MOULDER

There's an old man trudging along, shall we call him?

PEER GYNT

No, let him alone, he's a drunken scamp.

BUTTON MOULDER.

But perhaps he could——

PEER GYNT

Hush! No—don't call him!

BUTTON MOULDER

Is that the way of it?

PEER GYNT

Just one question:

What is it really to "be one's self"?

BUTTON MOULDER

That's a strange question from a man
Who just now——

PEER GYNT

Tell me what I asked you.

BUTTON MOULDER

To be one's self is to slay one's self¹
But as perhaps that explanation
Is thrown away on you, let's say:
To follow out, in everything,
What the Master's intention was.

¹ i. e., to kill the base part of one's nature that one's better self may live

Peer Gynt

PEER GYNT

But suppose a man was never told
What the Master's intention was?

BUTTON MOULDER

Insight should tell him

PEER GYNT

But our insight
So often is at fault, and then
We're thrown out of our stride completely

BUTTON MOULDER

Quite so, Peer Gynt And lack of insight
Gives to our friend with the Cloven Hoof
His strongest weapon, let me tell you

PEER GYNT

It's all an extremely subtle problem.—
But, listen, I give up my claim
To have been myself, it very likely
Would be too difficult to prove it
I'll not attempt to fight the point
But, as I was wandering all alone
Over the moor just now, I felt
A sudden prick from the spur of conscience.
I said to myself "You are a sinner——"

BUTTON MOULDER

Oh, now you're back to where you started——

PEER GYNT

No, not at all, I mean a *great* one,—
Not only in deed, but in thought and word
I lived a dreadful life abroad——

BUTTON MOULDER

May be, but have you anything
To show to prove it?

PEER GYNT

Give me time,
I'll find a priest, and get it all
In writing, properly attested

BUTTON MOULDER

If you can do that, it will clear things up,
And you will be spared the Casting-ladle
But my orders, Peer——

PEER GYNT

They're on very old paper,
It certainly dates from a long time back,
When the life I lived was loose and foolish
I posed as a Prophet and Fatalist —
Well, may I try?

BUTTON MOULDER

But——

PEER GYNT

Be obliging!
I'm sure you have no great press of business.
It's excellent air in this part of the country,
They say it adds years to the people's lives
The parson at Justedal used to say
"It is seldom that anyone dies in this valley"

BUTTON MOULDER

As far as the next crossroads—no farther.

PEER GYNT

I must find a parson, if I have
To go through fire and water to get him!

SCENE X

(SCENE — *A heathery slope A winding path leads up to the hills*)

PEER GYNT

You never can tell what will come in useful,
As Esben¹ said of the magpie's wing
Who would have thought that one's sinfulness
Would, in the end, prove one's salvation?
The whole affair is a ticklish business,
For it's out of the frying-pan into the fire,
But still there's a saying that's very true—
Namely, that while there's life there's hope

[A THIN PERSON, *dressed in a priest's cassock which is well tucked up, and carrying a bird-catcher's net over his shoulder, comes running down the hill*

Who's that with the bird-net? It's a parson!
Hurrah! I am really in luck to-day!—
Good afternoon, sir! The path is rough——

THIN PERSON

It is, but what would not one put up with
To win a soul?

PEER GYNT

Oh, then there's someone
Who's bound for heaven?

THIN PERSON.

Not at all,
I hope he's bound for another place

¹ Esben Askeladd, in a folk-tale, where his finding of a dead magpie led to his winning the hand of the fair Princess

PEER GYNT

May I walk with you a little way?

THIN PERSON

By all means, I'm glad of company.

PEER GYNT

Something is on my mind——

THIN PERSON.

Speak on!

PEER GYNT

You have the look of an honest man.
I have always kept my country's laws
And have never been put under lock and key,
Still, a man misses his footing sometimes
And stumbles——

THIN PERSON

That's so, with the best of us

PEER GYNT

These trifles, you know——

THIN PERSON

Only trifles?

PEER GYNT

Yes,

I have never gone in for wholesale sinning

THIN PERSON

Then, my dear man, don't bother me.
I'm not the man you seem to think.
I see you're looking at my fingers,
What do you think of them?

PEER GYNT

Your nails
Seem most remarkably developed

THIN PERSON

And now you're glancing at my feet?

PEER GYNT (*pointing*)

Is that hoof¹ natural?

THIN PERSON

Of course

PEER GYNT (*lifting his hat*)

I would have sworn you were a parson
And so I have the honour to meet—?
What luck! If the front door is open,
One doesn't use the servants' entrance,
If one should meet the King himself,
One need not seek approach through lackeys

THIN PERSON

Shake hands! You seem unprejudiced
My dear sir, what can I do to serve you?
You must not ask me for wealth or power,
I haven't such a thing to give you,
However willing I might be
You wouldn't believe how bad things are
With us just now, nothing goes right,
Souls are so scarce—just now and then
A single one—

PEER GYNT

Have people, then,
Improved so wonderfully?

¹ In Scandinavian folklore the Devil is traditionally represented with a horse's hoof for a right foot

THIN PERSON

No,
Just the reverse,—deteriorated
Shamefully, the most of them
End in the Casting-ladle

PEER GYNT

Ah!
I've heard a little about that,
It really was on that account
That I approached you

THIN PERSON

Speak quite freely!

PEER GYNT

Well, if it's not too much to ask,
I'm very anxious to secure——

THIN PERSON.

A snug retreat, eh?

PEER GYNT

You have guessed
What I would say before I said it
You say you're not doing much business,
And so perhaps my small suggestion
May not be irksome——

THIN PERSON.

But, my friend——

PEER GYNT

I do not ask for much. Of course
I shouldn't look for any wages,
But only as far as possible
To be treated as one of the family.

THIN PERSON.

A nice warm room?

PEER GYNT

But not too warm.

And, preferably, I should like
An easy access, in and out,
So that I could retrace my steps
If opportunity should offer
For something better

THIN PERSON

My dear friend,

I really am extremely sorry,
But you can't think how very often
Exactly similar requests
Are made to me by people leaving
The scene of all their earthly labours

PEER GYNT

But when I call to mind my conduct
In days gone by, it seems to me
I am just suited for admittance——

THIN PERSON

But they were trifles——

PEER GYNT

In a sense;

Still, now that I remember it,
I did some trade in negro slaves——

THIN PERSON

I have had folk who carried on
A trade in minds and wills, but still
Did it half-heartedly,—and they
Didn't get in

PEER GYNT

Well—I've exported
Idols of Buddha out to China

THIN PERSON

Rubbish! We only laugh at those.
I have known folk disseminating
Uglier idols, far—in sermons,
In art and literature—and yet
Not getting in

PEER GYNT

Yes, but—look here!
I've passed myself off as a Prophet!

THIN PERSON

Abroad? That's nothing! Such escapades
End mostly in the Casting-ladle
If you've no stronger claim than that,
I can't admit you, however much
I'd like to do it

PEER GYNT.

Well, but—listen!
I had been shipwrecked, and was clinging
Fast to a boat that had been capsized
“A drowning man clings to a straw,”
The saying goes, but there's another
“Everyone for himself”,—and so
The fact that the ship's cook was drowned
Was certainly half due to me.

THIN PERSON.

It would have been more to the point
If you had been responsible
For stealing half a cook-maid's virtue.

Begging your pardon, what's the good
Of all this talk of half a sin ?
Who do you think, in these hard times,
Is going to waste expensive fuel
On worthless rubbish such as that ?
Now, don't be angry, it's your sins
And not yourself I'm sneering at
Excuse my speaking out so plainly.
Be wise, my friend, and give it up,
Resign yourself to the Casting-ladle
Suppose I gave you board and lodging,
What would you gain by that ? Consider—
You are a reasonable man,
Your memory's good, it's very true,
But everything you can recall,
Whether you judge it with your head
Or with your heart, is nothing more
Than what our Swedish friends would call
" Very poor sport " There's nothing in it
That's worth a tear or worth a smile,
Worth boasting or despairing of,
Nothing to make one hot or cold—
Only, perhaps, to make one angry.

PEER GYNT

You can't tell where the shoe is pinching
Unless you've got it on, you know

THIN PERSON.

That's true, and—thanks to so-and-so—
I only need one odd one Still,
I'm glad you mentioned shoes, because
It has reminded me that I
Must push along. I've got to fetch
A joint I hope will prove a fat one
I haven't any time to spare
To stand here gossiping like this——

PEER GYNT

And may I ask what sort of brew
Of sin this fellow has concocted?

THIN PERSON

As far as I can gather, he
Has been persistently himself
By day and night, and that is what
Is at the root of the whole matter

PEER GYNT

Himself? Does your domain include
People like *that*?

THIN PERSON

Just as it happens,
The door is always left ajar
Remember that there are two ways
A man can be himself, a cloth
Has both a right side and a wrong
You know they've lately invented in Paris
A method by which they can take a portrait
By means of the sun They can either make
A picture like the original,
Or else what is called a negative
The latter reverses the light and shade,
To the casual eye it's far from pretty,
But the likeness is in it, all the same,
And to bring it out is all that is needed.
If in the conduct of its life
A soul has photographed itself
So as to make a negative,
They don't on that account destroy
The plate, they send it on to me
I take in hand the rest of the process,
And proceed to effect a transformation
I steam it, dip it, burn it, clean it,
With sulphur and other ingredients,

Till I get the likeness the plate should give,—
That's to say, what is called a positive
But when, as in your case, it's half rubbed out,
No sulphur or lye is of any use

PEER GYNT

So, then, one may come to you like soot
And depart like snow?—May I ask what name
Is on the particular negative
That you're on the point of converting now
Into a positive?

THIN PERSON

Yes—Peer Gynt

PEER GYNT

Peer Gynt? Indeed! Is Peer Gynt himself?

THIN PERSON

He swears he is

PEER GYNT

He's a truthful man.

THIN PERSON.

You know him, perhaps?

PEER GYNT

Just as one knows
So many people

THIN PERSON

I've not much time;
Where did you see him last?

PEER GYNT

At the Cape.

THIN PERSON.

The Cape of Good Hope?

PEER GYNT

Yes—but I think

He's just on the point of leaving there

THIN PERSON

Then I must start for there at once

I only hope I'm in time to catch him!

I've always had bad luck at the Cape—

It's full of Missionaries from Stavanger

[Goes off southwards.]

PEER GYNT

The silly creature! He's off at a run,

On a wrong scent, too He'll be disappointed.

It was quite a pleasure to fool such a donkey

A nice chap, he, to give himself airs

And come the superior over me!

He has nothing to give himself airs about!

He won't grow fat on his trade, I'll warrant,

He'll lose his job if he isn't careful

H'm! I'm not so very secure in the saddle,

I am out of the "self"-aristocracy

For good and all, as it seems to me

[A shooting-star flashes across the sky He nods to it]

Peer Gynt salutes you, Brother Star!

To shine,—to be quenched, and lost in the void—.

[Pulls himself together apprehensively and plunges deeper into the mist After a short silence he calls out.]

Is there no one in the universe—

Nor in the abyss, nor yet in heaven—?

*[Retraces his steps, throws his hat on the ground
and tears his hair By degrees he grows
calmer]*

So poor, so miserably poor
May a soul return to the darkling mists
And become as nothing Beautiful earth,
Forgive me for having trodden thee
All to no purpose Beautiful sun,
Thy glorious rays have shone upon
An empty shell—no one within
To receive warmth and comfort from thee,
The owner never in his house
Beautiful sun, beautiful earth,
'Twas but for naught you warmed and nourished
My mother Nature is a spendthrift,
And the Spirit but a greedy miser.
One's life's a heavy price to pay
For being born —I will go up,
Up to the highest mountain-tops;
I'll see the sun rise once again,
And gaze upon the promised land
Until my eyes are weary Then
The snow may fall and cover me,
And on my resting-place be written
As epitaph "The tomb of *No One*"!
And—after that—well, come what may.

CHURCHFOLK (*singing on the road*).

Oh, blessed day when the Gift of Tongues
Descended on earth in rays of fire!
O'er all the world creation sings
The language of the heavenly quire!

PEER GYNT (*crouching down in terror*).

I will not look! There's nothing there
But desert waste —I am in terror
Of being dead long ere my death

*[Tries to steal into the thickets, but finds himself
standing at crossroads]*

SCENE XI

(SCENE —*Crossroads* PEER GYNT *is confronted by the* BUTTON MOULDER)

BUTTON MOULDER

Good morning, Peer Gynt! Where's your list of sins?

PEER GYNT

I assure you that I have shouted and whistled
For all I knew!

BUTTON MOULDER

But yet found no one?

PEER GYNT.

Only a travelling photographer.

BUTTON MOULDER

Well, your time is up

PEER GYNT

Everything's up.
The owl smells a rat Do you hear him hooting?

BUTTON MOULDER

That's the matins bell——

PEER GYNT (*pointing*)

What's that, that's shining?

BUTTON MOULDER

Only a light in a house.

PEER GYNT

That sound

Like wailing?

BUTTON MOULDER

Only a woman's song.

PEER GYNT

'Tis there—there I shall find my list
Of sins!

BUTTON MOULDER (*grasping him by the arm*)

Come, set your house in order!

[*They have come out of the wood, and are standing
near SOLVEIG'S hut Day is dawning*]

PEER GYNT

Set my house in order? That's it!—Go!
Be off! Were your ladle as big as a coffin,
I tell you 'twould not hold me and my list!

BUTTON MOULDER

To the third crossroads, Peer, but *then*—!
[*Moves aside and disappears.*]

PEER GYNT (*approaching the hut*)

Backward or forward, it's just as far,
Out or in, the way's as narrow [Stops]
No! Like a wild unceasing cry
I seem to hear a voice that bids me
Go in—go back—back to my home

[*Takes a few steps, then stops again*]
“Round about,” said the Boyg!
[*Hears the sound of singing from the hut*]
No, this time

It's straight ahead in spite of all,
However narrow be the way!

[Runs towards the hut At the same time SOLVEIG comes to the door, guiding her steps with a stick (for she is nearly blind) She is dressed for church and carries a prayer-book wrapped up in a handkerchief She stands still, erect and gentle]

PEER GYNT (*throwing himself down on the threshold*)
Pronounce the sentence on a sinner!

SOLVEIG

'Tis he! 'Tis he! Thanks be to God!
[Grotes for him]

PEER GYNT

Tell me how sinfully I have offended!

SOLVEIG

You have sinned in nothing, my own dear lad!
[Grotes for him again, and finds him]

BUTTON MOULDER (*from behind the hut*)
Where is that list of sins, Peer Gynt?

PEER GYNT

Cry out, cry out my sins aloud!

SOLVEIG (*sitting down beside him*)
You have made my life a beautiful song.
Bless you for having come back to me!
And blest be this morn of Pentecost!

PEER GYNT.

Then I am lost!

SOLVEIG

There is One who will help.

PEER GYNT (*with a laugh*)

Lost! Unless you can solve a riddle!

SOLVEIG

What is it?

PEER GYNT

What is it? You shall hear
Can you tell me where Peer Gynt has been
Since last we met?

SOLVEIG

Where he has been?

PEER GYNT

With the mark of destiny on his brow—
The man that he was when a thought of God's
Created him! Can you tell me that?
If not, I must go to my last home
In the land of shadows

SOLVEIG (*smiling*)

That riddle's easy.

PEER GYNT.

Tell me, then—where was my real self,
Complete and true—the Peer who bore
The stamp of God upon his brow?

SOLVEIG.

In my faith, in my hope and in my love.

PEER GYNT

What are you saying? It is a riddle
That you are speaking now So speaks
A mother of her child.

SOLVEIG

Ah, yes,
And that is what I am, but He
Who grants a pardon for the sake
Of a mother's prayers, He is his father
[*A ray of light seems to flash on PEER GYNT*
He cries out

PEER GYNT

Mother and wife! You stainless woman!
Oh, hide me, hide me in your love!
[*Clings to her and buries his face in her lap.*
There is a long silence The sun rises

SOLVEIG (*singing softly*)

Sleep, my boy, my dearest boy!
I will rock you to sleep and guard you.

The boy has sat on his mother's lap
The two have played the livelong day.

The boy has lain on his mother's breast
The livelong day God bless you, my sweet!

The boy has lain so close to my heart
The livelong day. He is weary now.

Sleep, my boy, my dearest boy!
I will rock you to sleep and guard you.

[*The BUTTON MOULDER's voice is heard from*
behind the hut

BUTTON MOULDER

At the last crossroads I shall meet you, Peer,
Then we'll see—whether—! I say no more

SOLVEIG (*singing louder in the sunshine*)

I will rock you to sleep and guard you!
Sleep and dream, my dearest boy!